

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 12-06-2009		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) 21-07-2008 to 12-06-2009	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Narco-Terrorism: An increasing threat to US National Security				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) David A. Haupt, Lt Col (AD), USAF				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Forces Staff College Joint Advanced Warfighting School 7800 Hampton Blvd. Norfolk, VA 23511-1702				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER JFSC 25789	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution is unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The global drug trade continues to plague the U.S. by threatening American families, their finances, and their freedoms. In addition to an unacceptable toll on American lives, illicit drugs pose a serious threat to U.S. national security. Many countries have fallen victim to governmental corruption and destabilization as a result of the drug trade, and this should serve as a continuous warning to the rest of the world as to the gravity of this global problem. As long as there is a global demand for illicit drugs, the enormous profits from the drug trade will continue to attract criminals of all types as well as facilitate the activities of terrorists and organized criminals worldwide. For the U.S. the situation is even more troublesome. Faced with a faltering economy, which will inevitably lead to reductions in spending for national defense, every American should anticipate an increase in the threat to U.S. national security. This threat increase will be fueled by what most enemies of the U.S., and more importantly terrorists, perceive to be the end of a long-standing imperialistic influence on the world. Without question, terrorism will continue to be a threat to the U.S. for the foreseeable future.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Narco-terrorism, terrorism, narcotics, cartels, Mexico, Afghanistan, drug trafficking					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified Unlimited	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 73	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Ms. Stacey Newman
a. REPORT Unclassified	b. ABSTRACT Unclassified	c. THIS PAGE Unclassified			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 757-443-6301

JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE
JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL



NARCO-TERRORISM:
An increasing threat to U.S. National Security

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

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2 Jun 2009

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ABSTRACT

“One must also note the growing convergence of terrorist organizations with criminal cartels like the drug trade to finance their activities. Such cooperative activities will only make terrorism and criminal cartels more dangerous and effective.”¹

The Joint Operating Environment, 2008

The global drug trade continues to plague the U.S. by threatening American families, their finances, and their freedoms. In addition to an unacceptable toll on American lives, illicit drugs pose a serious threat to U.S. national security. Many countries have fallen victim to governmental corruption and destabilization as a result of the drug trade, and this should serve as a continuous warning to the rest of the world as to the gravity of this global problem. As long as there is a global demand for illicit drugs, the enormous profits from the drug trade will continue to attract criminals of all types as well as facilitate the activities of terrorists and organized criminals worldwide. For the U.S. the situation is even more troublesome. Faced with a faltering economy, which will inevitably lead to reductions in spending for national defense, every American should anticipate an increase in the threat to U.S. national security. This threat increase will be fueled by what most enemies of the U.S., and more importantly terrorists, perceive to be the end of a long-standing imperialistic influence on the world. Without question, terrorism will continue to be a threat to the U.S. for the foreseeable future. The current and future challenge for the U.S. will be preventing another terrorist attack similar to the one that occurred on September 11, 2001. While the majority of effort in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) is concentrated in regions of the world that do not pose an immediate

¹ U.S. Joint Forces Command, “*The Joint Operating Environment 2008: Challenges and Implications for the Future Joint Forces*,” November 2008, 47. Hereafter cited as *The Joint Operating Environment 2008*.

threat to Americans, there is a terrorist presence in countries in close proximity to the U.S. continuing to emerge unopposed.

The terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001 led to a new appreciation for global terrorism. The direct attack on U.S. soil forever changed the world by demonstrating even the most powerful nation is vulnerable to a large scale and well organized terrorist operation. Today, nations around the world are aligning to combat this ever present threat to global security. The GWOT and the “War on Drugs” are inseparable, with agencies from around the world working together as a force-multiplier in an effort to eliminate both terrorism and the illicit drug trade. The long-term solution for eliminating the illicit drug trade and its associated violence is the removal of the demand for illicit drugs. The illicit drug business will endure as long as there are enormous profits to be made. An even larger threat from the illicit drug trade is the revenue generated from this highly profitable industry that is then funneled to terrorist organizations. While most of the U.S. is fixated on its collapsing economy and the continued fighting in the Middle East, the threat of narco-terrorism is creeping closer to the U.S. quicker than Americans realize. Americans need to look no further than their bordering neighbor Mexico, which is on the verge of complete chaos. The escalating bloodshed and violence holding Mexico hostage today is currently bleeding over the border into the U.S. One of the hardest hit states is Arizona, and the residents who live there would most likely argue narco-terrorism has already arrived in the U.S. Arizona is currently experiencing an increase in violence in several cities, and the terrorism Arizona residents are suffering is the direct result of warring Mexican drug cartels. However, it is the overwhelming demand for illicit drugs in the U.S. that continues to fuel this violence.

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ACRONYMS

AFI.....	Federal Investigation Agency
ASNF.....	Afghan Special Narcotics Force
ATF.....	Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives
AUC.....	United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia
CNPA.....	Counter-Narcotics Police of Afghanistan
DEA.....	Drug Enforcement Administration
DOD.....	Department of Defense
DOJ.....	Department of Justice
DOS.....	Department of State
DTO.....	Drug Trafficking Organization
ELN.....	National Liberation Army
EPR.....	Popular Revolutionary Army
ETA.....	Basque Fatherland and Liberty
FARC.....	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FBI.....	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FSP.....	Sao Paulo Forum
GDP.....	Gross Domestic Product
GWOT.....	Global War on Terror
JIATF.....	Joint Interagency Task Force
JOE.....	Joint Operating Environment
JTF.....	Joint Task Force
IACM.....	Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement
KLA.....	Kosovo Liberation Army
IRA.....	Irish Republican Army
MDMA.....	Methylenedioxymethamphetamine
MRTA.....	Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement
MT.....	Metric Ton
NDCS.....	National Drug Control Strategy
NDIC.....	National Drug Intelligence Center
NSDUH.....	National Survey on Drug Use and Health

ONDCP.....	Office of National Drug Control Policy
PKK.....	Kurdistan’s Workers Party
PEF.....	Poppy Eradication Force
UCR.....	Uniform Crime Reporting Program
UK.....	United Kingdom
UN.....	United Nations
UNODC.....	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID.....	U.S. Agency for International Development
USNORTHCOM.....	U.S. Northern Command
USSOUTHCOM.....	U.S. Southern Command
VEO.....	Violent Extremist Organization
WMD.....	Weapons of Mass Destruction

*"If you quit drugs, you join the fight against terrorism."*²

President George W. Bush, December 14, 2001

I. Introduction

Drug trafficking has a long history and continues to pose an increased threat to U.S. national security. More importantly, the recognized association between drug trafficking and terrorism, known as "narco-terrorism," promotes increased violence at every level of stability and security. Former president Fernando Belaunde Terry of Peru first used the term narco-terrorism in 1983 when describing terrorist type attacks against his nation's anti-narcotics police.³ During that period, narco-terrorism was used to recognize the attempts of narcotics traffickers to influence the policies of a government through violence and intimidation as well as to hinder law enforcement and the administration of justice by the systematic threat of violence. Today, narco-terrorism is increasingly used to describe known international terrorist organizations that engage in drug trafficking activity to fund their operations. In an attempt to combat narco-terrorism, current U.S. policy primarily aims to eradicate drug crops as well as to assist other countries in building their own capacity to defeat the illicit drug trade and control their ungoverned territories.⁴ Unfortunately, U.S. leadership and policymakers are misguided in their strategy for combating narco-terrorism, and there is a significant lack of resources being applied to this increasing threat to U.S. national security. This paper

² President George W. Bush. Remark made when signing the Drug-Free Communities Act on December 14, 2001.

³ Jonas Hartelius, "Narcoterrorism," Policy Paper for the EastWest Institute and the Swedish Carnegie Institute, February 2008, 1.

⁴ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "A Better Strategy Against Narcoterrorism," MIT Center for International Studies, January 2006, 1.

will examine current U.S. policy on narco-terrorism and provide recommendations that should be adopted to effectively combat this threat. The following thesis statement establishes the position of this paper: “Narco-terrorism is recognized by U.S. leadership and policymakers as a legitimate threat to U.S. national security; however, a standalone counter narco-terrorism strategy does not exist. The current approach for combating narco-terrorism is embedded within U.S. counter-terrorism and counter-drug policies. To successfully combat the increasing threat of narco-terrorism, the U.S. must develop a strategy that successfully merges intelligence, law enforcement, military, governmental agencies, and technology specifically designed to defeat a very unique threat.” Once a counter narco-terrorism strategy is developed, the U.S. must then apply all of its available resources and capabilities against this threat.

The warning signs of narco-terrorism are diverse and far-reaching, and include increased drug production; widespread abuse of drugs; serious drug-related crime; threats to the rule of law, public security and public health; money laundering; infiltration of the legal economy; and financing of terrorism.⁵ It is well known that profits from drug trafficking contribute directly to the intensity and prolongation of military conflict, and more specifically, within terrorist organizations that grow stronger with the successful exploitation of the drug trade. The ongoing debate on how best to deal with narco-terrorism is a direct parallel to the ongoing debate on how best to deal with illicit drug trafficking and terrorism. In dealing with the illicit drug trade, consumer countries typically identify the production and distribution of illicit drugs occurring in a producer country and then focus on the elimination of the problem at the source, e.g. crop

⁵ Hartelius, iii.

eradication.⁶ The producer countries, predominantly developing countries, focus on the demand in the consumer countries as the key enabler to the illegal trade. These countries typically appeal to the consumer countries to reduce the demand in order to eliminate the problem, e.g. prevention, treatment, and local drug enforcement.⁷ Consequently, there are opposing strategies among consumer countries and producer countries as to how best to deal with illegal drug trade as each looks to the other as the root cause of the problem. To further compound the issue, these opposing strategies result in insufficient resources being offered by either side to effectively eliminate the threat. The current policies and views of the U.S., one of the largest consumer countries of the illegal drug trade, simply neglect very crucial underlying dynamics of the interaction between drug trafficking and terrorism. There is a faulty assumption in U.S. strategy that if the illegal drug trade were eliminated, terrorist organizations that gain financial resources from their access to the illicit economy would be significantly weakened if not altogether defeated.⁸

The current U.S. approach for combating narco-terrorism not only disregards the tremendous challenges in successfully eradicating an entire illicit drug market in a particular country, it also fails to recognize the unintended impact on the local populace who may be relying on the drug trade as their primary source of income. More importantly, terrorist organizations often derive significant political gains from their involvement with the drug trade.⁹ By protecting a dependable and often sole source of income for a local population, political legitimacy for a terrorist organization is quite

⁶ Ibid., iv.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Felbab-Brown, "A Better Strategy Against Narcoterrorism," 1.

⁹ Ibid., 2.

often endorsed by the labor force and their families. To further garner support, terrorist organizations will also offer protection to local workers from ruthless drug traffickers in addition to guaranteeing better prices for their labor.¹⁰ While the political legitimacy for these terrorist organizations is usually weak at best, it nonetheless motivates the local population from providing any intelligence to law enforcement agencies seeking to put an end to their livelihood.¹¹ Some examples of notorious terrorist organizations profiting from the illicit drug trade include the Taliban and the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), the National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia, the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) in Peru, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Great Britain, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in Yugoslavia, the Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey, and the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) in Spain.¹² While equally infamous terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaeda, do not have the means to control and tax the cultivation and processing of illicit crops, it's their ability to infiltrate established organizations that do, e.g., the Taliban. For the U.S., it is the partnership between Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO), like Al Qaeda, and Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO), like Mexico's Sinaloa drug cartel, that pose the biggest threat to U.S. national security.

¹⁰ Ibid, 3.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 2.

*"Narco-terrorism provides the economic fuel for insurgencies."*¹³

National Security Advisor James L. Jones, February 2009

II. Narco-Terrorism

Brief History

As previously mentioned, the concept of narco-terrorism was first introduced in 1983 by Peruvian President Terry to define terrorist-like attacks against his country's anti-narcotics police. These violent attacks carried out by drug traffickers were initially used to influence the politics of the country with the primary goal of obstructing justice. It wasn't until 1985 that narco-terrorism received a great deal of attention following an attack on the Supreme Court in Bogotá, Colombia. During this attack, the Medellín cartel joined forces with the M-19 terrorist group and killed eleven high judges in order to prevent the extradition of several cocaine profiteers to the U.S.¹⁴ Following this highly publicized terrorist attack, the U.S. government began fully recognizing the concept of narco-terrorism and began using it to describe the Soviet Union's involvement in the illicit drug trade.¹⁵ During the 1990s, narco-terrorism was used to elaborate on the various complexities of the illicit drug trade and the increasing violence and ideology associated with this growing phenomenon.¹⁶ Over time, narco-terrorism has evolved into two major themes. The first theme focuses on common criminals, such as drug cartels and local drug gangs, employing terrorist-like methods in order to protect their drug

¹³ General (Ret) James L. Jones. Remark by National Security Adviser Jones at the 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 8, 2009.

¹⁴ Hartelius, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

operations, as witnessed today in Mexico's drug wars. The second theme focuses on VEOs or terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaeda, becoming more involved in drug trafficking in order to finance their ideology and subsequent terrorist activities. It is the combination of these two themes the U.S. must fully recognize as a very distinct and increasing threat to the security of the nation.

Narco-Terrorism Defined

The Oxford dictionary defines narco-terrorism as "terrorism associated with the trade in illicit drugs."¹⁷ This definition, however, does not define which factor, terrorism or illicit drugs, plays a bigger role in influencing the other. Using the widely accepted definition of narco-terrorism, there is a broad range of individuals and groups that can be associated with narco-terrorism. In the U.S., the sale of illicit drugs continues to be extremely profitable for local criminals. As a result, these individuals have established significant power-bases in their communities, which constantly jeopardizes the safety and security Americans depend upon in their neighborhoods. All across the U.S., local gangs and drug pushers routinely resort to violence to terrorize neighborhoods in order to sustain their illegal activities. While narco-terrorism is currently viewed as a politically-motivated concept in dealing with high-profile organizations, it is important to note even the lowest forms of criminal behavior that exploits violence to protect illicit drug activity should be included. This distinction is very important because the widely accepted definition of narco-terrorism is so narrowly focused that before it can be dealt with appropriately the concept must be clearly defined and understood.

¹⁷ Oxford Dictionary, "*The New Oxford Dictionary of English*," Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Terrorism in its simplest form is best described as raw violence aimed at intimidating a population into permitting a terrorist organization to operate unopposed. To achieve this desired end-state, terrorists will resort to acts of kidnapping, murder, and bombings to achieve their objectives. The fundamental difference between terrorist organizations lie in their overall objectives, rather than the tactics employed to achieve their desired end-states. For terrorist organizations motivated by politics for example, targets are normally selected that support the organizations' political agenda. For drug traffickers on the other hand, targets are usually selected that further a profit-making agenda. Consequently, narco-terrorists may select targets that establish or enforce drug-trafficking boundaries, eliminate competition, or counteract government policies or action that threatens their illicit drug business.¹⁸ "Narco-terrorism is best understood as the organized employment of violence against the local populace, the security forces, and the government to intimidate anyone contemplating resistance to drug trafficking."¹⁹ Narco-terrorists may also have a political agenda, which could include the assassination or intimidation of local government officials who are attempting to eliminate the illicit drug trade in their country or region. It is important to make a clear distinction between terrorism and drug trafficking when defining narco-terrorism. While narco-terrorism is a multifaceted operation of drugs, violence, and power, it is the combination of the illicit drug trade with terrorism that has aggregated in such a way that it threatens democracy and the rule of law.²⁰

¹⁸ Gordon James Knowles, "Threat Analysis: Organized Crime and Narco-Terrorism in Northern Mexico," In *Military Review*, Jan-Feb 2008, 79.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Cooperation between Traffickers and Terrorists

Narco-terrorism should be thought of as a continuum, with one end made up of identifiable drug crimes motivated by profit and the other end made up of identifiable terrorist activities motivated by ideology. The cooperation between drug traffickers and terrorist organizations was originally not a predetermined conclusion. In fact, differences in ideology, ambitions for social status, and attitudes towards the government drew clear distinctions between these two ends of the spectrum.²¹ During the 1980s in South America, murder, kidnapping, and other crimes of violence regularly occurred between drug traffickers and terrorist organizations. However, cooperation between these two criminal organizations eventually materialized and has become an important part of the illicit drug trade. The U.S. has recognized this cooperation as being fundamental to the continued success of narco-terrorism and now views it as a driving force for both parties.²² Following the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania, the U.S. and the law enforcement community now view drug trafficking and terrorism as visibly intertwined. For the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), investigating the link between drugs and terrorism has heightened the visibility of DEA's mission. For the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), its national drug control strategy directly supports efforts to strengthen U.S. capabilities to identify and target the links between drug trafficking and threats to U.S. national security.²³ However, while the DEA and ONDCP are using their current counter-drug strategies to target narco-terrorist threats, their strategies fall short in identifying the true enemy.

²¹ Hartelius, 3.

²² Ibid.

²³ Office of the President of the U.S., *National Drug Control Strategy, 2008 Annual Report*, 34.

Cooperation between terrorism and the illicit drug trade can be traced back three decades. The focus of the U.S. in 1979, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, was on training and equipping fierce mujahideen fighters to resist communist occupation forces.²⁴ Profits from the illicit drug trade were a primary means for funding the mujahideen resistance. The same scenario is occurring today, but the outcome is less desirable for the U.S. than it was in 1979. Today, drugs produced in Afghanistan and South America are being smuggled into markets in both Europe and the U.S. As a result, hundreds of millions of dollars are being funneled to terrorist organizations around the world. The Mexican DTO is the most pervasive organizational threat to the U.S., and they are a perfect lifeline for terrorist organizations because they dominate the majority of the illicit drug trade in the U.S.²⁵ Any alliance between a Mexican DTO and a terrorist organization would undoubtedly result in further expansion of the drug trade in order to gain larger profits from the drug market. Since Mexican DTOs are already major transporters and distributors of most illicit drugs into the U.S., their established transportation routes and distribution networks offer terrorist organizations relatively easy access.²⁶ Arizona should serve as the wakeup call that terrorist organizations have discovered an entry way into the U.S. The terrorism that is occurring on U.S. soil is a direct result of warring Mexican DTOs. The illicit drug trade has perpetuated this access, and the question now for U.S. leadership is: “Can the violence occurring across America today be correctly identified as the introduction of narco-terrorism in the U.S.?”

²⁴ Scott McPherson, “The Drugs on War and Terrorism,” In *Freedom Daily*, The Future of Freedom Foundation, January 2004.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, *National Drug Threat Assessment 2008*, National Drug Intelligence Center, October 2007, 35.

²⁶ Ibid.

“...profits [from illicit drugs] accrue to a wide range of actors, from poor rural farmers to affluent urban dealers. But, in many instances, the single most profitable sector of the market is the process of transporting the drugs internationally. The funds raised by trafficking groups can be used to underwrite other criminal activity and even political insurgency.”²⁷

World Drug Report 2007, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

III. Illicit Drug Trade

Prior to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the U.S. law enforcement community dealt with drug trafficking and terrorist activities as separate issues. It wasn't until after this date these two issues were then viewed as interconnected. Both the DEA and ONDCP began to investigate the link between drugs and terrorism from a different perspective. However, it should be noted neither the DEA nor ONDCP specifically target terrorists or terrorist organizations, but rather investigate and prosecute drug traffickers and DTOs. To fully appreciate the interconnection between drug trafficking and terrorism, it is important to recognize some commonalities between these two activities. Whether a group is committing a terrorist act or trafficking illicit drugs, one common element shared is they are both forms of organized crime. Additionally, globalization has made it much easier for terrorist organizations to leverage profits from the sale of drugs. By exploiting advancements in technology, finance, communications, and transportation, both terrorists and drug traffickers have found it relatively easy to exploit the illicit drug market.²⁸ One of the most recognizable examples of how

²⁷ United Nations' Office on Drugs and Crime, *2007 World Drug Report*. United Nations Publication, 170. Hereafter cited as *2007 World Drug Report*.

²⁸ Steven W. Casteel, Assistant Administrator for Intelligence, Drug Enforcement Administration, *Narco-Terrorism: International Drug Trafficking and Terrorism - A Dangerous Mix*, Congressional Hearing Testimony, May 2003.

significant the impact globalization has had on the interconnection between terrorism and drug trafficking is the expansion of organized crime. This link is certainly evident in the connection between those who participate in illegal activities to fund their lifestyle or cause and their interaction with others involved in similar illegal activities. For example, organizations that launder money for drug traffickers will often utilize their existing infrastructure to launder money for terrorists. While globalization has made profiting from the illicit drug trade more enticing for all criminal elements, the true danger lies in the constant source of funding made available for terrorist activities.

Production

In the 2008 issue of the *World Drug Report*, it is noted a total of 208 million people, or 4.8% of the world population, in the 15 to 64 year-old age group, use illicit drugs.²⁹ Figure 1 further illustrates this data by comparing it with total world population

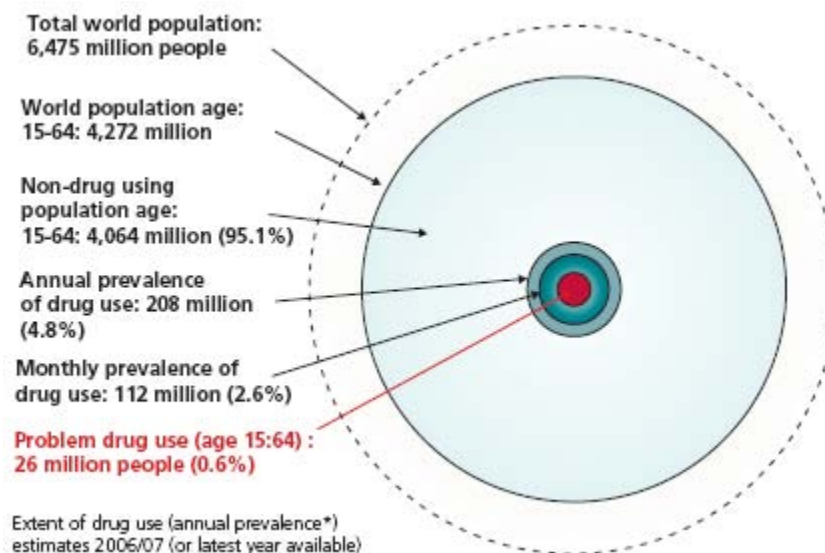


Figure 1. Illicit Drug Use at the Global Level (2006/2007)³⁰

²⁹ United Nations' Office on Drugs and Crime, *2008 World Drug Report*. United Nations Publication, 9. Hereafter cited as *2008 World Drug Report*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

as well as to frequency of illicit drug use. At the global level, heroin and cocaine continue to be the most popular and widely abused illicit drugs. For most of Europe and Asia, heroin continues to be the most abused drug, while for the U.S. it is cocaine. In Africa, the bulk of all treatment demand is linked to cannabis, or marijuana. The 2008 World Drug Report identifies Afghanistan as the primary producer of opium, producing approximately 82% of the world's heroin from the poppies grown in the country.³¹ Global opium production also reached record levels in 2007. Led by production in Afghanistan, it increased to the highest annual level of production recorded in the last two decades.³² The majority of the world's cocaine supply continues to flow from coca leaf cultivated in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, as identified in the 2008 drug report. During 2007, the total area under coca cultivation in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru increased 16%, but there were also indications of a shortfall in cocaine supply in the U.S. for the year.³³ Unlike other crops, the cultivation of opiate, coca leaf, and cannabis occurs under the threat of eradication, and so the location and the number of hectares produced vary substantially from year to year.³⁴ (A hectare is the metric unit for measuring land area. One hectare is 10,000 square meters or 2.471 acres). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) developed a model to make a more qualified estimate of the world trade in illicit drugs. Their findings show the drug trade is estimated to have a value of \$13 billion at the producer level, \$94 billion at the wholesale level, and \$322 billion at the retail level, annually.³⁵ The bottom line is the global trade

³¹ 2008 *World Drug Report*, 37.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 65.

³⁴ 2007 *World Drug Report*, 7.

³⁵ United Nations' Office on Drugs and Crime, 2005 *World Drug Report*. United Nations Publication, 12.

in drugs has a larger economic volume than the economies of most countries. To put this in perspective, data from the World Bank shows the profits from the sale of illicit drugs generates more income than 163 of the 184 countries for which statistics are available.³⁶ As long as there is a global demand for illicit drugs, the enormous profit margins will undoubtedly entice more and more terrorist organizations to seek opportunities in the illicit drug trade.

Globalization

As globalization continues to make world economies more interdependent, one of the unfortunate side effects of globalization is the strengthening of terrorist organizations. As previously mentioned, the relative ease Mexican DTOs have in transporting and distributing illicit drugs across the border into the U.S. not only facilitates the expansion and deepening of the global illicit economy, but also the spread of a variety of other illicit markets. This vastly growing global network continues to provide more lucrative and illegal opportunities for terrorist organizations. Furthermore, globalization is providing terrorists more than just money and weapons from these new opportunities. Terrorists are also gaining political capital with local populations. In many weak or failed states, the globalization of legitimate economies has failed to improve the living conditions for many populations in underdeveloped nations. In fact, globalization of legitimate economies can actually have a negative impact on those countries that have no goods or services to offer the rest of the world. This situation makes it exceedingly difficult, if not outright impossible, for many countries to compete in the legal global market. To fill this

³⁶ Hartelius, 4.

void, the globalization of illicit goods and services becomes the only means available to populations of ill-fated countries that have no other options for earning revenue. As terrorist organizations increasingly infiltrate the global illicit economy, they not only make more money, but also provide local populations with a lucrative source of income, thus acquiring legitimacy. This dynamic is strengthened if the government attempts to suppress the illicit economy in ways that threaten the population's livelihood, such as through the eradication of illicit crops.

In addition to terrorism, globalization also provides the means for increased transnational crime; to include financial fraud, money laundering, cyber-crime, human trafficking, counterfeit goods, and smuggling.³⁷ With continuous advancements in computer technology and worldwide networks, the movement of money between banks and countries has made it extremely difficult to monitor and detect international financial transactions. Technology has essentially enabled traditional and informal means of financial transactions to operate at the speed of electrons, and the old adage "follow the money" is simply not as easy to implement in this global age.³⁸ To make it even more difficult to trace illegal business transactions, terrorists have even resorted to using diamonds and precious metals as a medium of exchange, in addition to other forms of Cyber Currency such as E-Gold, that seem almost tailored for use by money launderers, narcotics traffickers, and terrorists.³⁹ These very innovative business practices not only reinsure the anonymity of the participants, but also guarantees the safe exchange of

³⁷ Sandro Calvani, "Transnational Organized Crime: A Global Concern," NATO Defense College, May 2008, 2.

³⁸ Dr. Marvin J. Cetron and Owen Davies, "55 Trends: Now Shaping the Future of Terrorism," In *The Proteus Trends Series*, Vol 1, Issue, February 2008, C-22.

³⁹ Ibid.

illegal currency because the transactions are simply too difficult to trace. The growing popularity of virtual currencies coupled with the innovative ways terrorists are exploiting the global illicit economy will undoubtedly inspire increased participation. While legitimate governments and law enforcement agencies around the world continue to expose the ingenious methods employed by terrorists, they will always be at a disadvantage due to cumbersome and inflexible bureaucracies that allow terrorist organizations to remain one step ahead. A good example of this is the very complicated issue of jurisdiction and the required international cooperation between governments, federal authorities, and local law enforcement required to defeat terrorism and global illicit economies. The ability of terrorist organizations to penetrate the global illicit economy and derive the multiple benefits from it, including increased finances, optimization of military tactics, and enhanced legitimacy, depends on a variety of factors, with the most important being the response of the government.⁴⁰

Narco-states

Governments exist to protect its citizens and in return the population is expected to give up some rights to government control. One of the most important agreements between a government and the people is the right to kill another human being. In civilized societies, the government should be the only entity legally entitled to take a human life, and the only exception for a citizen is when acting in self-defense. While there are obviously many legal aspects that can alter this definition, the purpose stated here is simply to acknowledge it as a fundamental concept. In its true sense, this social

⁴⁰ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Globalization and Narcoterrorism," *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association*, August 2006, 3.

contract is in place to prevent a civilized society from turning into chaos. Furthermore, this accepted governmental right to take human life must be carefully regulated because the legal system should protect citizens from unwarranted executions. In a narco-state, however, the government keeps up the charade of this social contract because ultimately the government serves the interests of drug traffickers rather than the citizens. In this environment, citizens remain protected by the government as long as it doesn't exact a cost upon the state-supported illicit trafficking. Referring to the previously mentioned 1985 terrorist attack on the Supreme Court in Bogotá, Colombia, the Medellín drug cartel solicited the help of a terrorist organization to launch attacks on federal officials. As a result, eleven judges were murdered who sought to bring the cartel to justice. Following these murders, the Medellín cartel then successfully infiltrated political parties within the Colombian government that served their interests in policy-making decisions, thus reclassifying Colombia as a classic example of a narco-state.⁴¹

In addition to governmental corruption, narco-states are also born out of financial corruption. While weak governments unable to stop armed groups from engaging in drug trafficking can ultimately lead to the formation of a narco-state, the most important underpinning of a narco-state remains money. With an estimated \$320 billion annual revenue, the global drug market provides a lot of incentive for corruption to exist.⁴² Additionally, a nation's military also has the leverage to corrupt a legitimate government and turn the country into a narco-state. Both Guatemala and the African nation of Guinea

⁴¹ Bruce M. Bagley, "Drug Trafficking, Political Violence and U.S. Policy in Colombia in the 1990s," In *Columbia in Context*, Center for Latin American Studies, University of California, [online], Available from http://clas.berkeley.edu/Events/conferences/Colombia/workingpapers/working_paper_bagley.html, February 2001.

⁴² 2007 *World Drug Report*, 170.

Bissau have fallen prey to corrupt senior military officials who have effectively manipulated their governments into becoming sponsors of the drug trade.⁴³ While a nation's military may coerce its government into corruption through the threat or use of force, a corrupt judicial or legislative system provides the means to covertly support and sustain a narco-state's illegal activities. Armed resistance to a legitimate government will often result in armed intervention from more powerful nations, but acts of bribery and kickbacks can easily go unnoticed and allow a narco-state to thrive unopposed. Even more frustrating for legitimate nations are the loopholes in the law that allows narco-states to protect drug traffickers through congressional and judicial policies. For decades, Mexico has been reluctant to turn suspects over to the U.S. to face criminal charges, seeing it as a loss of sovereignty. While there has been significant progress made between U.S. and Mexican law enforcement agencies in fighting drug-related violence through increased extraditions, the fact remains that Mexico's cocaine trade in the U.S. has exploded. From 2000 to 2006, the Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement (IACM) reported an increase in the estimated amount of cocaine flowing through Mexico to the U.S. from 66% in 2000, to 77% in 2003, to 90% in 2006.⁴⁴ Not all narco-states are alike however. There are some narco-states that may give implicit approval of drug production, but remain inactive in the drug trade. Afghanistan's opium production makes up a substantial percentage of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). With

⁴³ Josh Clark, "How Narco-States Work," [online], Available from <http://people.howstuffworks.com/narco-state.htm/printable>

⁴⁴ Jess T. Ford, Director, "U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotics Efforts, but the Flow of Illicit Drugs into the United States Remains High," testimony before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representative, [online], Available from <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/for102507.pdf>, October 2007, 7.

revenue like this, a government often hesitates to completely eliminate the drug trade. When faced with an overwhelming poverty rate and no other options for generating comparable income, the survival of the drug trade becomes even more important.

The following case studies will address narco-terrorism and its negative impact on Afghanistan, Mexico, and the U.S. The first two case studies will focus on Afghanistan and Mexico as narco-states, and how the illicit drug trade continues to finance terrorism and violence in these two countries. The third case study will address the growing threat of narco-terrorism in the U.S. and the inadequate measures the country is taking to prevent further terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. While there are many other countries that can be considered narco-states, Afghanistan and Mexico demand the U.S.' undivided attention. Americans know all too well the threat of Al Qaeda, but they have yet to truly appreciate the threat of Mexican DTOs. What should be even more frightening to Americans is the threat of these two terrorist organizations joining forces against one common enemy; the U.S. While the U.S. has been at war with Al Qaeda since the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the enemy still exists and their senior leadership is still in charge. Just as Al Qaeda successfully planned and executed the terrorist attack against the U.S. in 1993 and again in 2001, no American should misinterpret the last seven years without another direct attack as an indication the threat is gone. With a date set for the U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq, an increase in the U.S. military effort in the war in Afghanistan, and not enough attention being paid to Mexico, the conditions are ideal for terrorists to once again catch the U.S. by surprise. The purpose of these case studies is to bring to the forefront the seriousness of narco-terrorism as well as to highlight the inadequacies of current efforts to defeat this growing threat to America.

*“Either Afghanistan destroys opium or opium will destroy Afghanistan.”*⁴⁵

President Hamid Karzai, 2006

V. Case Studies

Afghanistan



Figure 2. Map of Afghanistan

With its continued production and sale of illicit drugs, Afghanistan can still be considered a primary supporter of terrorism. As long as there is a global demand for heroin and Afghans continue to be the primary supplier of opium, terrorist organizations will continue to reap huge profits from Afghanistan's illicit drug trade. While the majority of opium goes to Europe when it leaves the country, it's actually Afghanistan's neighboring countries that are the primary distributors to the rest of the world. This is

⁴⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime/Ministry of Counternarcotics, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2006: Executive Summary*, United Nations Publication, September 2006, iv.

primarily due to a lack of organizational control of the illicit drug market as well as poor global contacts. As previously mentioned, Afghanistan's impact on the narco-economy is far-reaching. UNODC estimated that Afghanistan cultivated 93% of the world's opium poppy in 2008, which sold for an estimated \$730 million to drug traffickers.⁴⁶ Of that \$730 million, it is estimated that the Taliban made \$50 to \$70 million from tax payments from farmers, while warlords, drug lords, and insurgents received an estimated \$200 to \$400 million from drug processing and trafficking.⁴⁷ "The connection between poppy cultivation, the resulting narcotics trade, and funding of insurgency groups became more evident in 2008; nearly all significant cultivation now occurs in insecure areas with active insurgent elements."⁴⁸ Poppy cultivation is now largely confined to seven provinces in the south and west of the country, adjacent to Afghanistan's borders with Pakistan and Iran. Consequently, Afghanistan's opium trade has resulted in an increase in addiction as well as HIV/AIDS endemics in India, Pakistan, and Iran.⁴⁹ Considered in terms of its estimated \$3.4 billion illicit export value, opium represented the equivalent of about one-fifth of Afghanistan's total GDP for 2008.⁵⁰ While only 12% of Afghanistan's land is arable (currently only 6% is cultivated), agriculture still remains the primary means of existence for the majority of the population.⁵¹

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, "*International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: Drug and Chemical Control*," Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Vol 1, March 2009, 107. Hereafter cited as *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Barnett R. Rubin, "Investing in Regional Cooperation for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan: A Central Task for the Stability of Southwest Asia," Speech delivered to the Afghanistan Development Forum in Kabul, April 2005, 5.

⁵⁰ *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, 111.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of State Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, [online], Available from www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm, November 2008.

With an estimated poverty rate of 60% and a per capita income of only \$300, poverty is the primary reason many farmers rely on the illicit economy for survival.⁵² These facts, coupled with the petty income farmers earn from growing wheat or corn, leave little doubt as to why many farmers choose to grow poppy. Furthermore, many farmers are pressured or forced into the illicit economy by trafficking organizations, warlords, and landowners given the exorbitant profits from poppy cultivation. While opium is a high value cash crop, which can be easily grown, there are still many farmers who choose not to grow poppy. The most prevalent reasons are the social and religious norms that stigmatize those who harvest illegal crops. The Quran strictly prohibits drug use, and by extension its production. This prohibition serves as the most common reason for those who choose not to grow poppy. Additionally, the fears of imprisonment, fines, eradication, and the fact it is illegal, serve as additional deterrents.⁵³ Moreover, in addition to those farmers who voluntarily participate in Afghanistan's illicit drug trade, there are those farmers who are coerced by trafficking organizations under the threat of violence. With any third world country, the economic situation is much better for those higher up on the criminal food chain. For the estimated 2.9 million Afghani farmers involved in the drug trade, they receive less than 20% of the revenue.⁵⁴ The landowners, warlords, traffickers, public officials, and terrorist organizations, such as the Taliban,

⁵² National Defense Authorization Act, "Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan," Report to Congress, June 2008, 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.

⁵³ United Nations' Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan: Farmers Intentions Survey 2003/2004*, United Nations Publication, February 2004, 19.

⁵⁴ Matthew Lacouture, "Narco-Terrorism in Afghanistan: Counternarcotics and Counterinsurgency," *International Affairs Review*, Vol XVII, No.2, [online], Available from <http://www.iar-gwu.org/node/39>, Fall/Winter 2008.

receive the majority of the profit.⁵⁵ In addition to receiving the lion's share of the revenue, these same criminals levy taxes as well as impose exploitative sharecropping and land tenure agreements upon the already impoverished poppy farmers. To continue to earn a living under these conditions, farmers are forced to borrow money from landholders using the expected crop yields as collateral. When the farmers are unable to repay the loans due to drought or a poor harvest, they become trapped in an endless cycle of debt and repayment.

Opium cultivation has existed in Afghanistan for thousands of years; however, it has only been in the last several decades the country has become responsible for producing the majority of the world's opium. Today, there are several influences that sustain opium production in the country, which include the current conflict, the absence of a legitimate centralized government, and an ineffective interdiction campaign. Additionally, as a direct result of the coalition invasion in 2001, a fourth influence emerged. This influence is undoubtedly the most troubling because it involves the increased terrorist participation in the opium trade, which ultimately fuels narco-terrorism. In Afghanistan, the illicit drug trade is closely tied to territorial control and political legitimacy.⁵⁶ In fact, the majority of past armed conflict in Afghanistan was fueled by the desire to control the opium market. In this context, land value goes up exponentially in proportion to the profits realized by the size of its opium crop. In Afghanistan's current war economy, the opium market unquestionably benefits those

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Carl Robichaud, "Supporting Entrepreneurship in Afghanistan," *Afghanistan Watch: A Project of the Century Foundation*, [online], Available from <http://www.tcf.org/afghanistanwatch/commentary.htm>, January 2005.

who can control any ungoverned territory, and traffickers continue to take advantage of this unexploited opportunity. While the commercial production of opium continues to be the only means of survival for many Afghan farmers, the desire to realize the full potential of the market by traffickers has led to the exploitation of ungoverned and unprotected land suitable for harvesting poppy. As a result, the illicit drug trade is more confined in Afghanistan to those regions that are more remote and hostile, thus limiting counter-narcotics efforts due increased protection by terrorist organizations, such as the Taliban. To protect their illicit drug market from law enforcement, traffickers provide weapons, funding, and personnel to the Taliban in exchange for the protection of drug trade routes, poppy fields, and their organizations.⁵⁷

Terrorist activity has been on the rise in Afghanistan since 2003. Figure 3 depicts

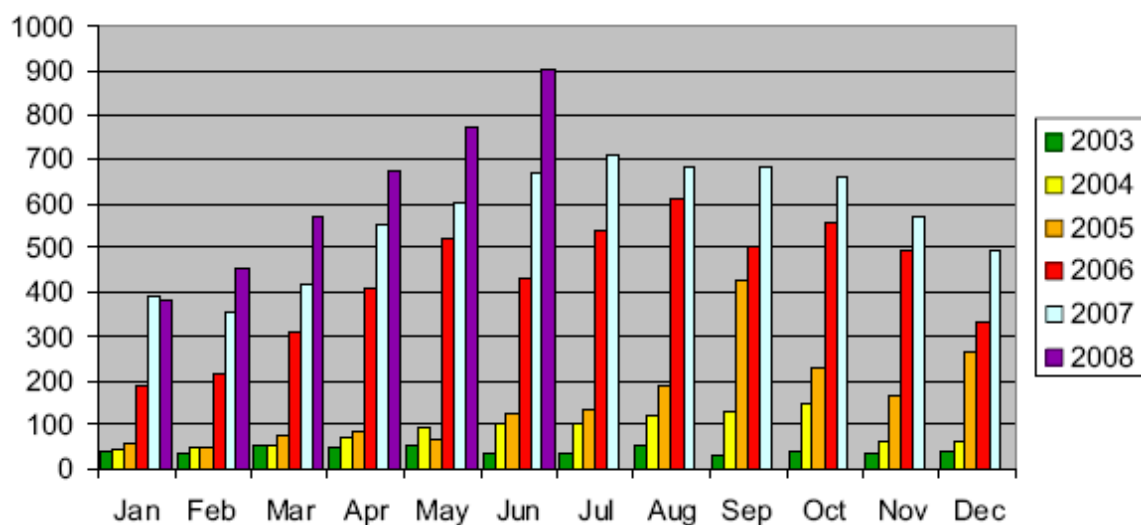


Figure 3. Security Incidents in Afghanistan, January 2003 to June 2008⁵⁸

⁵⁷ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*. Drug and Chemical Control, Vol I, March 2008, 240.

⁵⁸ United Nations' Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008*, United Nations Publication, August 2008, 19. Hereafter cited as *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008*.

the increase in security incidents that occurred between January 2003 and June 2008. The number of security incidents increased sharply in 2006, which was a direct result of the increase in poppy cultivation. In response, Afghanistan's Poppy Eradication Force (PEF) increased eradication efforts, which led to a change in the nature of attacks between 2007 and 2008. "In 2007, police deaths were the result of violence by farmers whereas deaths in 2008 were the result of insurgent actions, including suicide attacks."⁵⁹ These latest attacks can be linked to both the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and are mainly in response to the opposition to the Afghan government as well as the attempts to eliminate the drug trade. Interestingly enough, an unbiased look at terrorism in Afghanistan reveals some of these terrorists were once "freedom fighters" struggling against the Soviets during the 1980s.⁶⁰ To assist the Taliban in their conflict with the Soviets, the U.S. and Pakistan played a significant role in providing weapons and funding to these "freedom fighters." Furthermore, not only were the Taliban fighting against the Soviets, but they were also fighting against the growing Afghan opium economy. In fact, in 2001 the Taliban had successfully managed to eliminate the majority of the country's opium trade through harsh tactics, which included beheading those farmers who did not comply.⁶¹ That was in the spring of 2001, and as a result, hundreds of poppy farmers moved to neighboring states that were more forgiving of their trade. Following September 11, 2001 and the removal of the Taliban, the opium crops returned to Afghanistan.

Led by the U.S. and the United Kingdom (U.K.), cooperative efforts with

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Zhou Rong, "The Way Out for Afghanistan: A Chinese Scholar's View," In *Afghanistan: Unabated Turmoil*. Institute of Regional Studies in Islamabad, May 2008, 237.

⁶¹ John Glaze, "Opium and Afghanistan: Reassessing U.S. Counter-Narcotics Strategy," *Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College*, October 2007, 7.

Afghanistan in counter-drug operations have been underway for several years. Shortly after becoming Afghanistan's President, Hamid Karzai declared a "jihad against poppy," citing that growing poppy was both illicit under Islam and harmful to the very future of the state.⁶² This sentiment was further supported by the establishment of a strict "zero-tolerance" counter-narcotics law, which made it illegal to grow and sell opium. The Afghan National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) was also introduced by President Karzai and is based on four guiding principals: (1) disrupting the drug trade; (2) strengthening and diversifying legal rural livelihoods; (3) reducing demand and providing treatment to problem drug users; and (4) developing state institutions at the central and provincial level to combat drug trafficking.⁶³ Developed in parallel to the NDCS, the U.S. counter-narcotics strategy is outlined by an eight-pillar strategy, with the majority of effort focused on the following five pillars: (1) public information; (2) alternative development; (3) elimination/eradication; (4) interdiction; and (5) law enforcement/justice reform.⁶⁴ To oversee the country's counter-narcotics efforts are Afghanistan's Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and the Ministry of Interior. Within the Ministry of Interior, the Counter-Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA) and the Afghan Special Narcotics Force (ASNF) have been created to implement counter-narcotics policies, but both forces remain strongly reliant upon U.S. and U.K. assistance, training, and funding.⁶⁵ The primary U.S. agencies assisting Afghanistan in pursuit of both strategies are the U.S. Department of State (DoS), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID),

⁶² Ibid., 7.

⁶³ Glaze, 8.

⁶⁴ Ambassador Thomas A. Schweich, U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Counter-Narcotics Strategy for Afghanistan," *Counternarcotics and Justice Reform in Afghanistan*, August 2007, 17.

⁶⁵ Glaze, 9.

Department of Defense (DoD), and Department of Justice (DoJ).⁶⁶ While counter-narcotics programs resulted in a 19% reduction in opium cultivation, from 193,000 hectares in 2007 to 157,000 hectares in 2008, evidence shows the problem is more geographically concentrated and more severe due to security issues.⁶⁷ Figure 4 graphically depicts 98% of the total opium cultivation is confined to seven provinces with “extreme” security risks.⁶⁸

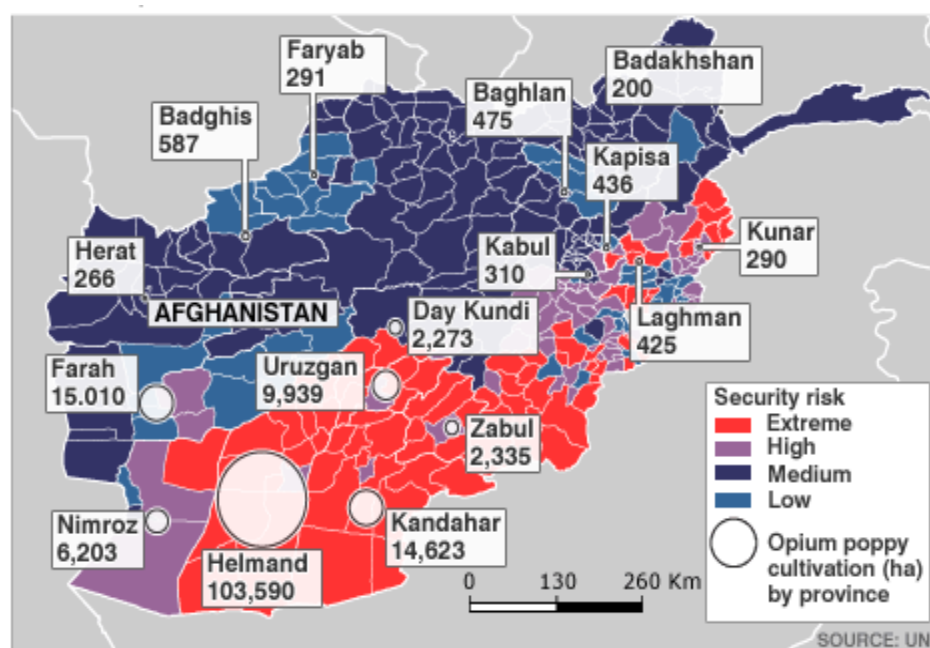


Figure 4. Security Map and Opium Cultivation by Province, 2007-2008⁶⁹

To achieve a 19% reduction in opium cultivation, Afghanistan’s PEF has primarily focused on eradication. Eradication efforts in 2008 did decrease, which were attributed to the success of the alternative crop programs as well as a high concentration

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008*, 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid., vii.

⁶⁹ Office of the President of the U.S., *National Drug Control Strategy, 2009 Annual Report*, 32.

of lawlessness in Afghanistan's southern provinces. As a result, the number of hectares eradicated nationwide declined from 19,047 hectares in 2007 to 5,480 hectares in 2008.⁷⁰ From an economic standpoint, unless poppy farmers are afforded the opportunity to earn a living growing alternative crops, eradication simply puts more of a drain on the economy. The drug market provides the only access to land, credit, water, and employment for many farmers, especially those in remote and less governed regions of the country. Until additional investment is made in providing more security to lawless regions, alternative economic opportunities are simply unrealistic. Furthermore, eradication efforts have served to bolster legitimacy for terrorist organizations with the local populace due to their support of the opium farmers. Other negative consequences of the eradication approach have included increased attacks on law enforcement officials attempting to eliminate opium crops. Additionally, opium farmers who have become unemployed as a result of the destruction of their drug fields have been easily recruited by the terrorists. Without providing an alternative means to earn a living, the eradication policy also seriously damages the legitimacy of the government. Since legitimacy is critical for the long-term success of Afghanistan's newly established central government, an eradication campaign under these conditions simply further weakens the country. For Afghanistan, the emphasis on eradication in the current counter-narcotics strategy must be shifted to focus on the other four pillars of the U.S. plan. Of these four pillars, success thus far is a direct result of law enforcement's ability to provide security, which in turn allows opium farmers to safely pursue alternative crops to harvest. Out of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan, 18 were poppy free in 2008 compared to 13 in 2007, and 98%

⁷⁰ *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, 109.

of the total opium cultivation was confined to only seven provinces which were marred with security problems.⁷¹ Given these facts, providing a clear sense of security to the citizens of Afghanistan must be the primary objective within both counter-narcotics and counterinsurgency strategies. While there has been some success, ultimately the responsibility rests with Afghanistan's government and its ability to build a viable and cohesive central government. Furthermore, impoverished Afghans must view the government as legitimate and feel economically and personally secure under the watchful eye of the administration. Until this occurs, narco-terrorists will continue to exploit Afghan farmers, and the lawlessness and violence will continue to plague the country.

“Under the leadership of President Karzai, the Government of Afghanistan has made some progress in combating narcotics; however, drug trafficking remains a serious threat to the future of Afghanistan, contributing to widespread public corruption, damaging legitimate economic growth, and fueling violence and insurgency.”⁷² The elimination of the illicit drug market in Afghanistan requires a long-term solution. Unfortunately, after more than six years of implementing a counter-narcotics strategy, Afghanistan's government is making small strides in achieving any long-term success at eliminating opium cultivation. While assistance from the international community is crucial, the bulk of the effort remains within the Afghan government. It should come as no surprise the drug trade has infiltrated all levels of Afghanistan's government and mass corruption exists from top to bottom. Corruption is present at all levels of the Afghan government. “Executive branch officials, legislators, police chiefs, and governors have

⁷¹ *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008*, 3.

⁷² *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, 7.

been implicated in trafficking, enabling, bribery schemes and related narco-corruption.”⁷³

As a result, drug trafficking not only finances local militias and warlords, but the Taliban and Afghan officials as well.⁷⁴ With corruption existing at all levels of the government, many officials and warlords operate with complete impunity. In effect, the illicit drug trade will continue to be one of the greatest threats to the reconstruction and stabilization efforts in Afghanistan. “To date, counter-narcotics policies in Afghanistan have failed for three primary reasons: (1) a fundamental lack of security; (2) pervasive and crippling corruption; and (3) the pursuit of an unbalanced and misdirected “five-pillar” strategy, which is overly focused on eradication.”⁷⁵ With the continued violence and lawlessness associated with the illicit drug trade threatening to destroy the country, it is clear Afghanistan’s current policies and efforts in counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism are failing. Until Afghanistan establishes itself as a legitimate government with the capacity to enforce the rule of law, realizing any long-term success for the country will remain unrealistic. Like Afghanistan, Mexico is also faced with a narcotics and terrorist problem that is currently plaguing the country. However, unlike Afghanistan, a bigger challenge facing Mexico is the lack of any outside assistance to help them win their war against the drug cartels, and ultimately, to help prevent the country from spiraling into complete chaos.

⁷³ Schweich, 15.

⁷⁴ Dennis O. Young, “Overcoming The Obstacles To Establishing A Democratic State In Afghanistan,” *Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College*, October 2007, 11.

⁷⁵ Lacouture.

“Any descent by Mexico into chaos would demand an American response based on the serious implications for homeland security alone.”⁷⁶

The Joint Operating Environment (JOE), 2008

Mexico



Figure 5. Map of Mexico

Mexico shares a 2,000-mile border with the U.S., and the majority of the terrain between the two countries is very rugged. Since the vast majority of the environment is mountainous, to include large desert areas with extreme high and low temperatures, the number of practical overland routes cross-border travelers can use is very limited. These environmental conditions channel most traffic, including criminal activity, through only a handful of areas. Not surprisingly, these areas tend to be situated near adjacent U.S. and Mexican cities located right along the border. The border between the U.S. and Mexico has always been vulnerable to trafficking, and it continues to provide a perfect location

⁷⁶ *The Joint Operating Environment 2008*, 36.

for terrorist organizations to generate illicit profits and gain access to the U.S. More importantly, terrorist organizations can take advantage of the lawlessness and instability created by warring DTOs, and in the middle of this chaos carry out well planned and coordinated attacks. As one DEA official stated, “What we know for sure is that persons associated with terrorist groups have discovered what cartels have known all along: the border is the back door into the U.S.”⁷⁷ This discovery is at the heart of the connection between terrorist organizations and DTOs. Of the 43 officially recognized terrorist organizations, the DEA has linked 19 of them to some aspect of the global drug trade.⁷⁸ To further strengthen the bond between these two groups, there are many similarities between them. Both groups “oppose nation-state sovereignty, function best in ungoverned spaces, depend on mutual shadow facilitators, have no regard for human rights, rely on the hallmarks of organized crime such as corruption, intimidation, and violence, and are highly sophisticated organizations that operate with the latest technology.”⁷⁹ The only real difference between DTOs and terrorists is motivation. Profit is the driving force behind a DTO, whereas terrorist organizations have political or ideological motivations and primarily require revenue to fund their terrorist activities. While both groups use similar methods to achieve their goals, it is the country of Mexico that provides the perfect environment for both groups to operate with little to no opposition due to the lawlessness inside the country’s borders.

Mexico is the primary channel for the majority of illicit drugs flowing out of

⁷⁷ Sara A. Carter, "Terrorists Teaming with Drug Cartels," *The Washington Times*, August 8, 2007.

⁷⁸ Matthew Levitt and Michael Jacobson, "Countering Transnational Threats: Terrorism, Narco-Trafficking, and WMD Proliferation," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, February 2009, 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

South America and headed for the U.S. Cocaine remains the leading drug threat for Americans, and approximately 90% of all detected cocaine shipments transit Mexico.⁸⁰ For 2007, the IACM estimated between 545 and 707 MTs of cocaine was shipped out of South America and bound for the U.S.⁸¹ The data in figure 6 depicts documented cocaine shipments out of South America from January through December 2007. In Mexico,

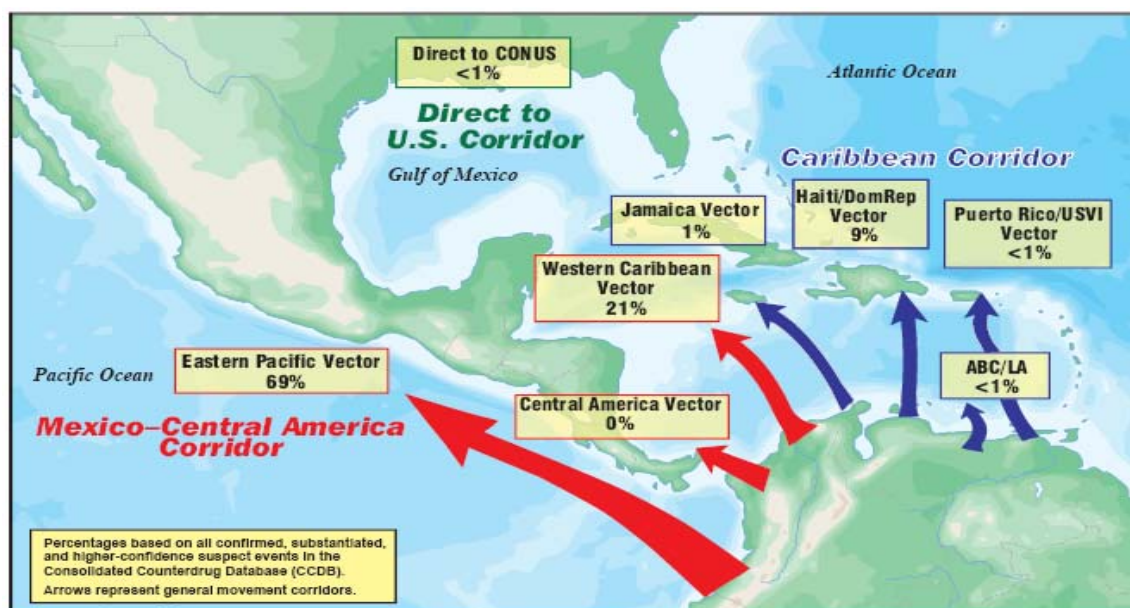


Figure 6. Cocaine Flow Departing South America⁸²

DTOs control the majority of drug trafficking throughout the country. In addition to cocaine, Mexican and Asian DTOs are also responsible for producing and distributing

⁸⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, "National Drug Threat Assessment 2009," National Drug Intelligence Center, December 2008, 2. Hereafter cited as *National Drug Threat Assessment 2009*.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 3.

heroin, marijuana, methamphetamine, and MDMA (methylenedioxymethamphetamine, commonly referred to as ecstasy) to the U.S. market.⁸³ While drug trafficking generates

⁸³ U.S. Department of Justice, “*Drug Market Analysis 2008: Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area*,” National Drug Intelligence Center, June 2008, 5.

enormous profits for DTOs, it's the money laundering side of the business that allows illicit earnings to go undetected. The National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) estimates Mexican and Columbian DTOs launder between \$18 billion and \$39 billion in drug proceeds annually, of which a large portion is bulk-smuggled out of the U.S.⁸⁴ The total cost to American lives as a result of the illicit drug market is difficult to fully measure; however, it is estimated more than 35 million individuals used illicit drugs or abused prescription drugs in 2007.⁸⁵ In Arizona on the other hand, the cost of the illicit drug market is measurable. Arizona is currently faced with an epidemic of drug-related murders and kidnappings. "This is organized crime, said Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard. The enemy we are combating is extremely well organized, extremely disciplined, and extremely well trained."⁸⁶ Phoenix, Arizona now ranks second in the world (Mexico City ranks first) in kidnappings for ransom, with 366 abductions reported in 2008.⁸⁷ "Hundreds of people are being kidnapped, raped and killed, said Sen. Jonathan Paton, R-Tucson. Body parts are cut off if ransoms aren't paid fast enough. Drug cartel members are being assassinated in our own state. This is very real, and policymakers need to hear about the dangers."⁸⁸ It is obvious from this evidence Mexican DTOs represent the greatest organized crime threat to the U.S. What isn't clear to U.S. leaders and policymakers is that this organized crime is actually narco-terrorism in its truest form. The unanticipated danger lies in this threat escalating from the murder

⁸⁴ *National Drug Threat Assessment 2009*, 49.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, III.

⁸⁶ Dennis Wagner, "Law Officials Testify on Border Violence," *The Arizona Republic*, February 2009.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

of innocent civilians by warring DTOs to mass murder of Americans at the hands of VEOs.

For years there has been a growing anti-Americanism in Latin America that is reinforced by a radical ideology. Fidel Castro's anti-American pronouncements and his declarations in favor of international Communism, mimicked today by Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez, are seen as an underpinning to the continued animosity towards the U.S. In the past, Castro supported illicit drug trafficking to the U.S. as a means to weaken the American population.⁸⁹ Today, this threat not only comes from DTOs, but also from extremists who come to Latin America to use Mexico as a port of entry into the U.S. A current day example of this connection between extremists and Latin American countries is the Sao Paulo Forum (FSP). The FSP was founded in 1990 by Fidel Castro and Lula da Silva, then president of Brazilian Workers Party, in the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil.⁹⁰ The primary goal of the FSP is the unification of communist factions in Latin America. The FSP brought together most of the leading communist and socialist organizations of Latin America as well as notorious terrorist groups such as the FARC.⁹¹ The FSP provides the perfect forum for terrorists to discuss common beliefs with a variety of well connected leaders and politicians as well as to collaborate on more actionable ways to pursue common interests. While DTOs and terrorist groups operate under different leadership and their desired end-states are not always the same, they routinely participate in similar criminal activities to generate revenue. Latin America has

⁸⁹ Maria C. Werlau, "Fidel Castro, Inc: A Global Conglomerate," [online], Available from <http://www.canf.org/2006/1in/ensayos/2006-may-26-fidel-castro.htm>, May 2006.

⁹⁰ Robert G. Breene, *Latin American Political Yearbook 2000*. Transaction Publishers, 1998, 216.

⁹¹ Ibid.

always had problems with radical groups using drug money to fund operations against established governments; however, for VEOs like Al Qaeda, it's the perfect breeding ground to expand their terrorist network and to exploit the illicit drug trade to fund their ideological pursuits.

In recent years there have been several reported sightings of Al Qaeda terrorists operating in Central and South America. In November 2005, an Al Qaeda operative from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) terrorist watch list was captured near the Mexican border. Representative John Culberson, R-Texas, confirmed the Al Qaeda terrorist, an Iraqi national, was captured in Mexico and turned over to the FBI.⁹² According to Congressman Culberson, "Americans do not need to go to Iraq to see the war on terrorism - we only need to go to the Rio Grande, especially Laredo."⁹³ Likewise, Britain's secret intelligence service, MI6, discovered documents during anti-terrorist raids in Pakistan linking Al Qaeda to terrorist organizations in Latin America. These documents provide clear evidence Al Qaeda has established links with the FARC, the Shining Path, Mexico's Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR), and thousands of Muslim students in the Dominican Republic.⁹⁴ The documents also revealed Al Qaeda views EPR as collaborators for attacks in Mexico on foreign targets, specifically U.S. and U.K., as well as playing a key role in assisting Al Qaeda operatives enter the U.S. through

⁹² U.S. Congressman John Culberson, 7th District of Texas, [online], Available from <http://culberson.house.gov/News.aspx?A=199>, December 2005.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 109th Congress, "*Reviewing the State Department's Annual Report on Terrorism*," hearing before the Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, [online], Available from http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa27478.000/hfa27478_0f.htm, May 2006. Hereafter cited as *Reviewing the State Department's Annual Report on Terrorism*.

Mexico.⁹⁵ This evidence clearly shows Al Qaeda's intent to illegally enter the U.S. with the assistance of Latin American terrorist organizations. While there is evidence linking Al Qaeda to Latin American VEOs, there is very little evidence of Al Qaeda's participation in drug trafficking in Central and South America. As pointed out in the previous case study, Al Qaeda does benefit from Afghanistan's opium trade; however, no real evidence exists today linking Al Qaeda with DTOs. Although it should be pointed out as violence escalates in the Mexican drug wars, execution-style murders are being discovered that are eerily similar to the tactics used by Al Qaeda; to include beheadings. If an Al Qaeda presence in Latin America continues unopposed, the need to generate revenue would most likely lead to their participation in the illicit drug trade. They have reaped the benefits from Afghanistan's opium market, and the opportunities in Latin America are equally prosperous. The nexus between terrorism and drug trafficking is creating what Michael Braun, DEA Chief of Operations, called "hybrids" that are "one part terrorist organization and are becoming one part global drug trafficking cartel."⁹⁶

For Mexico to end the growing violence between warring DTOs, in addition to eliminating the illicit drug trade, they must garner more U.S support. Mexico's President Felipe Calderón stated, "We need to combat together this common problem, our fight with organized crime."⁹⁷ Jorge Casteneda, the former foreign minister of Mexico, further supported his President's sentiment by stating, "Mexico needs much more U.S. support

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Robert Hendin, "DEA Digging Into Al Qaeda Drug Links: Experts Say Link Between Drugs And Terror Is Strengthening," *CBS News Investigates*, [online], Available from http://terrorism.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?zi=1/XJ&sdn=terrorism&cdn=newsissues&tm=79&gps=313_855_1020_565&f=00&tt=2&bt=1&bts=1&zu=http%3A/www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/07/18/cbs_news_investigates/main4274339.shtml, July 2008.

⁹⁷ Bill Whitaker, "The War Just Across The Border," *CBS Evening News*, [online], Available from <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/01/28/eveningnews/main4761209.shtml>, January 2009.

and involvement. Much more money, much more effort, much more intelligence-sharing.”⁹⁸ Mexico cannot fight and win this war without U.S. involvement, which the current drug-war statistics overwhelmingly endorse. As of March 2009 there have been approximately 7,300 drug-war related deaths in Mexico.⁹⁹ There can be no doubt in anyone’s mind, especially U.S. leadership, that narco-terrorism exists on the U.S.-Mexican border and the violence is bleeding over into U.S. cities and towns. At least 230 American citizens have been killed and an estimated 184 have been kidnapped inside Mexico since 2003 (see figure 7).¹⁰⁰ Like in Afghanistan, Mexico is also struggling with



Figure 7. U.S. Citizens Killed or Kidnapped in Mexico since 2003¹⁰¹

corruption inside the government as well as in their police and military units, who have direct links to the drug cartels and smugglers. “Frustration among senior U.S. officials

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Los Angeles Times, “Mexico Under Siege: The drug war at our doorstep,” *LA Times.com*, [online], Available from <http://projects.latimes.com/mexico-drug-war/#/its-a-war>, March 17, 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Lise Olsen, “Mexican murders, American victims,” *Express News* and the *Houston Chronicle*, [online], Available from http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/mexico/Mexican_murdersAmerican_victims.html, February 2009.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

over Mexican corruption is acute, particularly after the arrest of drug czar Noe Ramirez. He is alleged to have been receiving \$500,000 a month from the Arturo Beltrán Leyva drug gang in exchange for intelligence, some of which originated with U.S. officials at the U.S. Embassy.”¹⁰² Consequently, the corruption doesn’t stop at the Mexican border. President Calderón stated during a March 4, 2009 interview with the Mexican AFP news agency, “Drug trafficking in the U.S. is fueled by the phenomenon of corruption on the part of the American authorities.”¹⁰³ Even more damaging are reports the majority of weapons used in drug-war related killings are coming from the U.S. “We need to stop the flow of guns and weapons towards Mexico,” President Calderón told the Associated Press. “Let me express to you that we’ve seized in this two years more than 25,000 weapons and guns, and more than 90 percent of them came from the U.S., and I’m talking from missile launchers to machine guns and grenades.”¹⁰⁴ Mexican DTOs are stocking up on deadlier weapons. U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) officials stated, “they have registered more purchases of high-powered FN Herstal rifles and pistols; the Belgian-made weapon called “matapolicias” in Mexico, or “cop killers,” for their ability to fire through body armor.”¹⁰⁵ Clearly, if Mexico has any chance of winning the war against DTOs and the associated terrorism, the U.S. must take a much more active role, to include possible military action.

¹⁰² Alfredo Corchado, “Mexico’s drug violence expected to intensify in ’09,” In *The Dallas Morning News*, [online], Available from http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/world/mexico/stories/DN-mexviolence_04int.ART.State.Edition2.4a508fe.html, January 2009.

¹⁰³ Jay Koester, “Mexican President blames U.S. corruption for hampering drug war, *El Paso Times*, [online], Available from http://www.elpasotimes.com/ci_11852600?source=most_email, March 2009.

¹⁰⁴ CBS News and the Associated Press, “*Mexico: U.S. Must Stop Gun Trade At Border*,” [online], Available from <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/02/28/world/main4835694.shtml>, February 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Joel Millman, “U.S. Gun Trial Echoes in Drug-Torn Mexico,” *The Wall Street Journal*, [online], Available from <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123595012797004865.html>, March 2, 2009.

A strong relationship between the U.S. and Mexico is of fundamental importance to both countries and to the region. Mexico is the U.S.' third largest trading partner as

well as the third largest source of U.S. oil imports.¹⁰⁶ Conversely, immigration continues to be a major source of tension in U.S. relations with Mexico, which is by far the largest migrant-sending country from Latin America.¹⁰⁷ Along with migration comes the smuggling of illicit drugs into the U.S. and the ensuing violence and bloodshed. Illicit drug trafficking has now spread so widely across the hemisphere it can no longer be regarded as a “U.S. problem” or a “Mexican problem.” The threat posed by DTOs can only be countered through coordinated efforts across producing, consuming, and transshipment countries, all of which have a shared interest in controlling the flow of arms, money, and drugs. Mexico and the U.S. are facing the same enemy in the war on narco-terrorism. The enemy is an elusive, sophisticated, resourceful, violent, and globally connected network that is exploiting U.S. and Mexican weaknesses and vulnerabilities. The DoD estimates Mexico's two most deadliest drug cartels together have fielded more than 100,000 foot soldiers; Mexico's army has about 130,000 soldiers.¹⁰⁸ Mexico is losing the war with DTOs and the country is at grave risk of becoming a failed state; a failed state that shares a 2,000-mile border with the U.S. and has a population of over 100 million people.¹⁰⁹ If the U.S. fails to join forces with Mexico to win this war against narco-terrorism, Mexico could spiral into complete chaos, leaving the U.S. faced with further economic problems and a homeland security crisis of immense proportions.

¹⁰⁶ Report of the Partnership for the Americas Commission, “*Rethinking U.S.–Latin American Relations: A Hemispheric Partnership for a Turbulent World*,” The Brookings Institution, November 2008, 12 and 17.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰⁸ Sarah A. Carter, “100,000 foot soldiers in Mexican cartels,” *The Washington Times*, March 3, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “*Mexico*,” The World Factbook, [online], Available from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mx.html>

“Spiraling drug violence in Mexico, narcotics trafficking elsewhere in Latin America, and a thriving opium trade in Afghanistan pose significant national security threats to the U.S.”¹¹⁰

Obama Administration, February 2009

United States



Figure 8. Mexican DTO Presence in U.S. Cities, January 2006 - April 2008¹¹¹

Current Threat

In recent years, the U.S. has targeted DTOs, primarily in Columbia and Mexico, in an attempt to reduce America's demand for illicit drugs. The current tactics employed for combating DTOs are the result of the convergence of U.S. counter-drug and counter-

¹¹⁰ Matthew Lee, “US sees serious threat in Mexico drug violence,” *The Associated Press*, In *The Washington Post*, February 27, 2009.

¹¹¹ *National Drug Threat Assessment 2009*, 58-59.

terrorism strategies. The data in figure 9 and the following statistics clearly shows how ineffective this strategy has been on reducing the demand for drugs in the U.S.

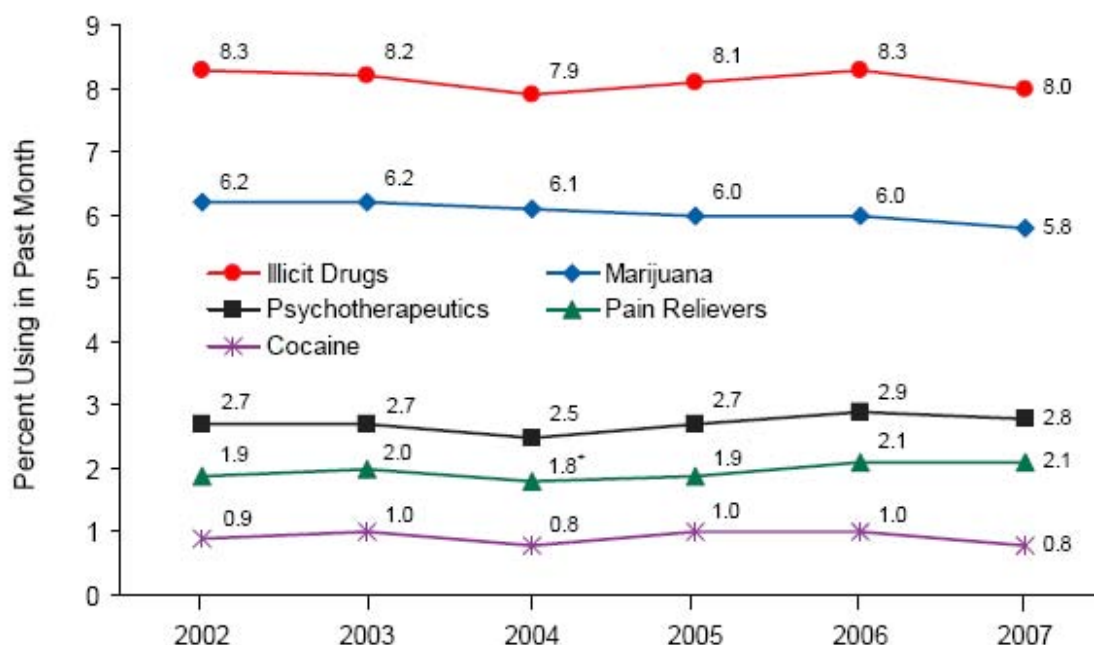


Figure 9. Illicit Drug Use Among Youths and Young Adults¹¹²

- “In 2007, an estimated 19.9 million Americans aged 12 or older were current illicit drug users. This estimate represents 8 percent of the population aged 12 years old or older. Illicit drugs include marijuana/hashish, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, or prescription-type psychotherapeutics used non-medically.”¹¹³
- “The overall rate of current illicit drug use among persons aged 12 or older in 2007 (8.0 percent) was similar to the rate in 2006 (8.3 percent) and has remained stable since 2002 (8.3 percent).”¹¹⁴
- The U.S. is the world's largest consumer of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana and a major consumer of ecstasy and methamphetamine.¹¹⁵

¹¹² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings,” Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, September 2008, 17.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “Field Listing – Illicit Drugs,” The World Factbook, [online], Available from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2086.html>. Hereafter cited as *Field Listing – Illicit Drugs*.

As long as there is a demand for illicit drugs in the U.S., a threat to U.S. national security will exist. There has been commendable progress made at times in reducing the flow of drugs; however, the fact remains U.S. demand has stayed relatively constant for many years. All the countermeasures in the world can be implemented to stop the flow of drugs, but as long as there is demand in a U.S. market worth billions of dollars, the supply will follow. DTOs, terrorists, and drug users will always find ways to adapt to changes in drug policy, counter-drug and counter-terrorism initiatives, and every other attempt to eliminate the illicit drug trade. More than 35 million Americans are estimated to use illicit drugs or abuse prescription drugs, which is roughly 8 percent of the population.¹¹⁶ The former White House drug czar, John P. Walters, stated, “American drug users are paying ruthless Mexican kingpins nearly \$14 billion annually for their meth, heroin, cocaine, and especially marijuana – monies that are helping fund an unprecedented bloody turf war that's threatening Mexican institutions.”¹¹⁷ The U.S. drug market is a goldmine for drug traffickers, but it is the increasing violence between warring DTOs that is the real threat of narco-terrorism for Americans. David Johnson, assistant secretary for the U.S. Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs has publicly recognized narco-terrorism is spreading into North America. “The illicit drug trade is directly linked to known terrorist groups in the Western Hemisphere and these groups are employing terrorist tactics to traffic drugs into North America.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ *National Drug Threat Assessment 2009*, III.

¹¹⁷ Alfredo Corchado, “Drug czar says U.S. use fueling Mexico violence,” In *The Dallas Morning News*, [online], Available from <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/latestnews/stories/022208dnintdrugs.3a98bb0.html>, February 22, 2008.

¹¹⁸ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “*Narco-Terrorism Spreading to North America*,” National Terror Alert Response Center, [online], Available from <http://www.nationalterroralert.com>, April 30, 2008.

Mr. Johnson also stated terrorist organizations are in fact working with Mexican DTOs to facilitate narco-trafficking. “These worrisome links have expanded to North America, and particularly in the case of some Mexican-based drug trafficking organizations. They have pushed past intimidation to employ terrorist tactics to enforce their drug trafficking monopolies on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.”¹¹⁹

Enemy Defined

The immediate threat of narco-terrorism in America can be directly linked to Mexican DTOs. While Mexican DTOs have existed for decades, they have become much more powerful since the demise of Colombia's Cali and Medellín cartels in the 1990s. According to the Mexican government, seven DTOs operate in Mexico.¹²⁰ According to the DEA, four of these DTOs control the majority of illicit drug production and trafficking in Mexico and operate with relative impunity in certain parts of the country.¹²¹ They are the Federation, which operates throughout Mexico and along the U.S. border, and the Tijuana, Juárez, and Gulf cartels, which operate primarily along the U.S.-Mexico border.¹²² The Federation, also referred to as the Sinaloa Cartel, is led by the Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman.¹²³ So wealthy from the illicit drug trade, El Chapo was ranked 701st in Forbes magazine's 2009 world's billionaires report

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Colleen W. Cook, Analyst in Latin American Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division, “*Mexico’s Drug Cartels*,” Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, October 16, 2007, 1. Hereafter cited as *Mexico’s Drug Cartels*.

¹²¹ U.S. Government Accounting Office, “*Drug Control: U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotics Efforts, but Tons of Illicit Drugs Continue to Flow into the United States*,” Report to Congressional Requestor, GAO-07-1018, August 2007, 15. Hereafter cited as *Drug Control*.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Fox News, “Mexican Drug Lord Makes Forbes Richest List,” FoxNews.com, [online], Available from <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,508946,00.html>, March 11, 2009.

with an estimated fortune of \$1 billion.¹²⁴ The Tijuana Cartel, previously led by Arellano Félix, was a family operated DTO in Tijuana, Mexico, which borders the city of San Diego, California. Arellano Félix was arrested in October 2008 by Mexican authorities, and following his arrest the cartel split into a network of criminal cells now led by Fernando Sánchez Arellano.¹²⁵ A lot of the recent bloodshed in Tijuana is a result of the turf wars between former members of the Tijuana Cartel. Since the late 1980s, the Juárez Cartel, led by Vincente Carrillo Fuentes, has controlled the drug trade in Ciudad Juárez, which borders El Paso, TX.¹²⁶ The violence in Juárez, which has resulted in thousands of deaths, is the result of the bloody turf war between the Juárez and Sinaloa cartels. The Gulf Cartel, which is considered the most powerful DTO, operates out of the city of Matamoros, adjacent to Brownsville, TX. The main Gulf Cartel leaders are Jorge Eduardo “El Coss” Costilla Sanchez, believed to be the cartel’s top leader, and Heriberto “Lazca” Lazcano, who controls the Los Zetas.¹²⁷ The Los Zetas, the Gulf Cartels’ enforcers, are a paramilitary organization of former Mexican soldiers who realized there was a lot more money to be made in the drug market than in serving in the Mexican military. The Los Zetas are known for their violent methods and intimidation and are thought to be working closely with corrupt law enforcement officials. As previously pointed out, Mexican DTOs dominate the illicit drug market in the U.S., and the arrests of key drug cartel leaders has led to increasing drug violence as DTOs fight for control of

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Sandra Dibble, “Split within Arellano Félix cartel leads to more violence,” *Union Tribune*, [online], Available from <http://www3.signonsandiego.com/stories/2009/jan/04/n52766113653-arellano-f233lix-drug-cartel-split-sm/>, January 4, 2009.

¹²⁶ James Mckinley, “Wild West bloodbath in Ciudad Juárez,” *New York Times*, April 16, 2008.

¹²⁷ STRATFOR Global Intelligence, “*Mexico: The Drug Trade Without the Gulf Cartel*,” [online], Available from http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/mexico_drug_trade_without_gulf_cartel, January 24, 2008

territory, smuggling routes, and control of local markets. The aftermath of the Mexican drug-wars will most likely be determined by two factors; which DTO is the most powerful and which DTO controls the most territory. Regardless of the outcome, one thing is for certain, illicit drugs and the associated violence will continue to plague the U.S. Figure 10 illustrates the areas of influence of the four predominant Mexican DTOs. Additionally, figure 8 depicts the location of the reported 230 U.S. cities where Mexican DTOs maintain drug distribution networks.¹²⁸

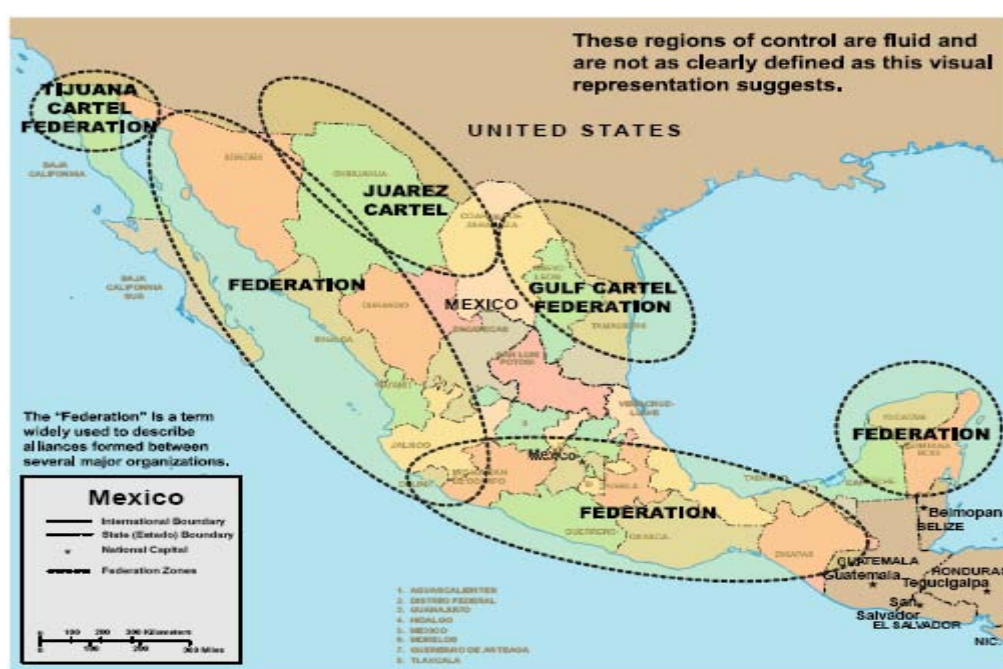


Figure 10. Areas of Influence of the Principal Mexican DTOs¹²⁹

Future Threat

While Mexican DTOs are the immediate threat to the U.S., the future threat will come from several different directions. The highest priority for the U.S. must be VEOs

¹²⁸ *National Drug Threat Assessment 2009*, 45.

¹²⁹ *Mexico's Drug Cartels*, 3.

and their access to America via established DTO smuggling routes. VEOs currently have established networks in Latin America and could use the region as a base to launch attacks. As mentioned earlier, there are credible reports of an Al Qaeda presence in Central and South America, which include established links with the FARC, the Shining Path, and the EPR.¹³⁰ More importantly, information collected also confirms Al Qaeda's intent to use the EPR for assistance to illegally enter the U.S. through Mexico.¹³¹ According to Admiral Jim Stavridis, commander of the U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), "Even as crime, drugs, and gangs remain a continuing concern, Southern Command also focuses on the potential threat terrorism poses to U.S. soil and to the nations in the region. This comprises all types of terrorism, including narco-terrorism."¹³² Admiral Stavridis went on to say, "For sure, members, facilitators, and sympathizers of Islamic terrorist organizations are present in our hemisphere. We consider Latin America as being highly likely bases for future terrorist threats to the U.S. and others."¹³³ The U.S. has been monitoring VEO presence in Latin America since September 11, 2001. The Lebanon-based Hezbollah has been the most prominent VEO in Latin America, specifically in the tri-border region of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay.¹³⁴ In a recent interview, Admiral Stavridis also highlighted an increase in Iranian activity in Latin America in support of Hezbollah, which is a completely different threat altogether.¹³⁵ While the presence of VEOs in Latin America must remain an area

¹³⁰ *Reviewing the State Department's Annual Report on Terrorism.*

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Admiral Jim Stavridis, "We're All In This Together," *Americas Quarterly*, [online], Available from <http://www.americasquarterly.org/node/316>, Fall 2007.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ David Morgan, "U.S. says Iran increasing activity in Latin America," *Reuters*, [online], Available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSN17295774>, March 17, 2009.

of great interest to the U.S., the most significant threat will come from a potential VEO joining forces with a Mexican DTO for the sole purpose of launching a direct attack against the U.S. This type of terrorist attack could involve a chemical or biological weapon, such as Anthrax or Sarin Gas, capable of killing thousands of people. The established smuggling routes into the U.S. makes this a very realistic scenario since only one chemical or biological weapon is needed to achieve the desired effects, and the weapon could be as small as a soda can.

In addition to VEOs, local gangs affiliated with the illicit drug trade continue to pose an increasing threat to U.S. cities across America. With an estimated one million gang members belonging to more than 20,000 gangs across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, many traffic illicit drugs at the regional and national levels and are fully capable of competing with U.S.-based Mexican DTOs.¹³⁶ In addition to running their own drug operations, many U.S. gangs are intent on developing working relationships with established DTOs. As mentioned, drug distribution networks operated by Mexican DTOs have been reported in 230 U.S. cities. Gang members are the primary retail-level distributors for the Mexican DTOs and they are increasingly distributing wholesale-level quantities of marijuana and cocaine in most urban and suburban communities.¹³⁷ One of the largest Hispanic gangs in the U.S. that is closely associated with Mexican DTOs is Mara Salvatrucha, also known as MS 13. The gang is estimated to have 30,000 to 50,000 members worldwide, of which 8,000 to 10,000 reside primarily in the Atlanta, Dallas,

¹³⁶ U.S Department of Justice, “*National Gang Threat Assessment 2009*,” National Gang Intelligence Center, January 2009, iii. Hereafter cited as *National Gang Threat Assessment 2009*.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and New York metropolitan areas.¹³⁸ “Members smuggle illicit drugs, primarily powder cocaine and marijuana, into the U.S. and transport and distribute the drugs throughout the country. Some members also are involved in alien smuggling, assault, drive-by shootings, homicide, identity theft, prostitution operations, robbery, and weapons trafficking.”¹³⁹ In addition to distributing illicit drugs, many local gang members are also being hired by Mexican DTOs to act as “hit men” or assassins. One current case involves two U.S. teenagers recruited by Los Zetas to act as hit men in the U.S. Both teenagers received 6-month military-style training in Mexico, and were paid up to \$50,000 and two kilos of cocaine for carrying out a hit.¹⁴⁰ Prior to being arrested, authorities taped a phone conversation in which one of the teenagers brags about killing a 14 year-old and his cousin: “Cardona laughs as he describes torturing the two boys and dumping their bodies in large metal drums filled with diesel fuel. He says he made “guiso,” or stew, with their bodies.”¹⁴¹ The brutality and complete disregard for human life is appalling. Even more disturbing is the fact the two perpetrators, American teenagers, are believed to be responsible for at least seven murders in Texas. Increasing violence from the illicit drug trade exists in every city in America. According to law enforcement officials, gangs commit as much as 80 percent of the crime in many communities, to include murder, drug trafficking, and weapons trafficking.¹⁴² However, the weapons trafficking occurring between the U.S. and Mexico demands much more

¹³⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ed Lavandera, “Police: U.S. teens were hit men for Mexican cartel,” *Cable News Network (CNN)*, [online], Available from <http://www.cnn.com/2009/CRIME/03/12/cartel.teens/index.html>, March 12, 2009.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² *National Gang Threat Assessment 2009*, iii.

scrutiny because it is directly responsible for the increased violence in Mexico today. If this violence continues to escalate, the U.S. could be forced to react to a failing state crisis on its border; a situation the country has never faced before.

If the Mexican government fails to defeat narco-terrorism and the illicit drug trade, the escalating violence in the country could eventually culminate into a catastrophic event. Mexico could spiral into complete chaos, leaving the country in a “failed state” status. If this occurs, the U.S. will undoubtedly be faced with a security crisis of immense proportions, which would then require every available federal, state, and local law enforcement agency to immediately respond to the millions of Mexicans attempting to seek safety and shelter in the U.S. To stop the violence from escalating, the U.S. must take every measure to stop the flow of illegal weapons into the hands of out-of-control DTOs. U.S. arms dealers and weapons traffickers are responsible for fueling the violence and bloodshed currently taking place in Mexico, which is now spilling over into the U.S. In November 2008, along the border with Texas, Mexican authorities arrested drug cartel leader Jaime “el Hummer” Gonzalez Duran. When arrested, “El Hummer was being transported to the airport in an armed vehicle, and his fellow cartel members launched a brazen attack against the federales. They were armed to the teeth. Their arsenal ranged from semi-automatic rifles to rocket-propelled grenades. When the smoke finally cleared, Mexican federal agents captured 540 assault rifles, more than 500,000 rounds of ammunition, 150 grenades, 14 cartridges of dynamite, 98 fragmentation grenades, 67 bulletproof vests, seven Barrett .50-caliber sniper rifles, and a Light Anti



Figure 11. Arms Captured in Arrest of 'El Hummer' in November 2008.¹⁴³

Tank rocket (figure 11).”¹⁴⁴ DTOs are building an arsenal that Mexico’s military and local law enforcement simply cannot compete against. To make matters worse, the Mexican Army is becoming a revolving door for the enforcement arm of the drug cartels primarily due to better pay; in 2008 more than 17,000 soldiers deserted from the Mexican Army.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, there are indications DTOs are combining forces to confront Mexico’s futile attempts to defeat the drug cartels. If this comes to fruition, Mexico will be faced with a civil war they will not win without U.S. intervention. While ending the flow of illegal weapons into Mexico must be a top priority for the U.S. to help stop the escalating violence, ultimately it is defeating narco-terrorism and eliminating the illicit drug trade that will guarantee long-term peace and security in Mexico and the U.S. To realize this endstate, the U.S. must develop a narco-terrorism strategy specifically

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Matt Sanchez, “Mexican Drug Cartels Armed to the Hilt, Threatening National Security,” *Fox News*, [online], Available from <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,487911,00.html>, February 4, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

designed to accomplish these two objectives.

Counter Narco-Terrorism Strategy

Regrettably, the most current information regarding America's illicit drug use and the government's efforts to significantly reduce the drug supply is sobering. The reality of the situation is demand in the U.S. has stayed relatively constant for many years, which is evidenced by the fact the U.S. remains the world's largest consumer of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the death rate from illicit drug use continues to get worse for Americans. Figure 12 shows the increase in drug-induced deaths between 1999 and 2005 (most current data available). In 1999 there were 19,128 drug-induced deaths compared to 33,541 in 2005; this includes a 63 percent increase in deaths caused by cocaine alone.¹⁴⁷ With an estimated 35 million Americans, spending roughly \$14

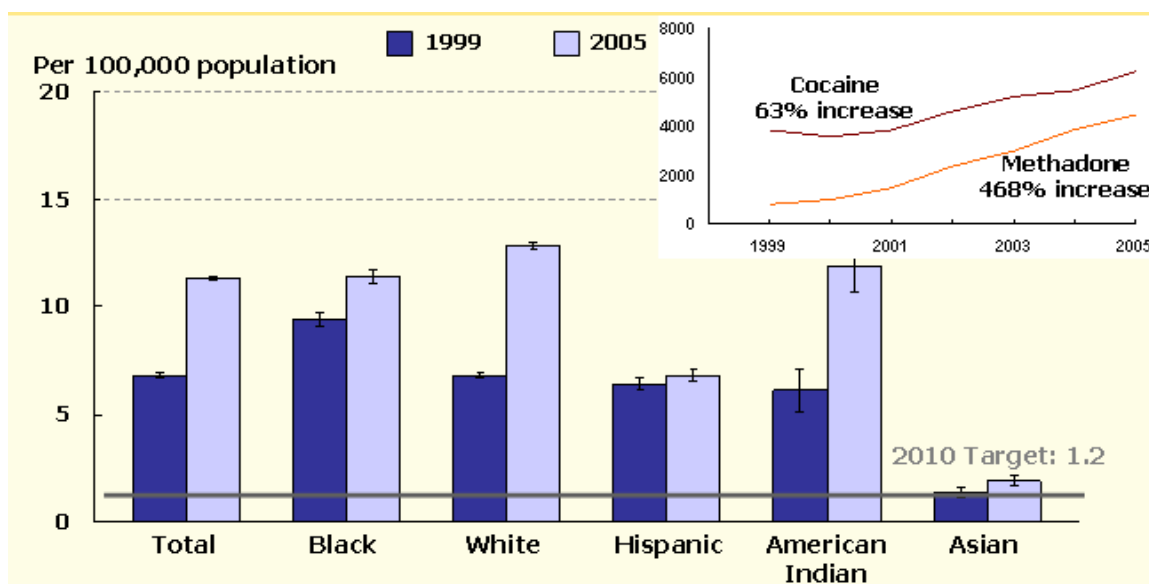


Figure 12. Drug-Induced Deaths, 1999 - 2005¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ *Field Listing – Illicit Drugs.*

¹⁴⁷ Hsiang-Ching Kung, Ph.D.; Donna L. Hoyert, Ph.D.; Jiaquan Xu, M.D. and Sherry L. Murphy, B.S., "Deaths: Final Data for 2005," U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Vital Statistics Reports, Division of Vital Statistics, Volume 56, Number 10, April 24, 2008, 82.

¹⁴⁸ Richard J. Klein, "Substance Abuse Progress Review," Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), National Center for Health Statistics, October 2, 2008, Slide 15.

billion annually on illicit drugs, it should be painfully obvious to U.S. leaders and policymakers the current strategy is ineffective.¹⁴⁹ More importantly, the threat to U.S. national security is increasing at an alarming rate as a direct result of the U.S. illicit drug market. The violence and bloodshed will only intensify as Mexican DTOs continue to battle for control of territory, smuggling routes, and control of local drug markets. While the U.S. is putting a lot of effort and energy into fighting the “War on Drugs,” the end results of all this hard work only reaffirms the illicit drug market remains intact. As a result, if the U.S. is going to win the war on drugs, a new strategy must be designed specifically to defeat narco-terrorism. Furthermore, the U.S. must recognize it is no longer just a war on drugs, but a “War on Narco-Terrorism.” The violence Americans are experiencing as a result of the Mexican drug-war is in fact terrorism, and the perpetrators of this violence must be treated as terrorists. Combined with the drug related deaths and the percentage of Americans addicted to illicit drugs, there is no doubt narco-terrorism has infiltrated the U.S. The first step in defeating this threat is correctly identifying narco-terrorism as the problem. Once recognized and accepted by U.S. leaders and policymakers, a standalone counter narco-terrorism strategy must then be developed that successfully merges intelligence, law enforcement, military, governmental agencies, and technology. At the core of a counter narco-terrorism strategy is the use of all available resources and capabilities to identify, hunt down, and capture/kill the key leadership and henchmen responsible for spreading narco-terrorism in the U.S. In addition to a standalone strategy, the right organization must be established to execute this mission. The best part, the U.S. already has an existing and very successful 20 year

¹⁴⁹ *National Drug Threat Assessment 2009*, III.

old model to base this organizational structure. The Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-South) is the premier organization for cooperation among international partners, U.S. military and interagency organizations. Based at U.S. Naval Air Station, Key West, FL, JIATF-South is primarily responsible for counter-drug operations in Central and South America. JIATF-South's success is based on bringing all the unique capabilities and resources of several organizations and departments together as one team, with one common mission. While JIATF-South is responsible for stopping the flow of drugs before they enter the U.S., a counter narco-terrorism organization must have the authority to defeat narco-terrorism both outside and inside U.S. borders.

An illicit drug market has existed in the U.S. for many years; however, the criminals responsible for the drug trade have significantly changed. The U.S. now faces an elusive, sophisticated, resourceful, violent, and globally connected enemy, who will employ every measure necessary to protect a \$14 billion U.S. drug industry. For Mexico, this includes over 7,300 murders in a 2-year period. For the U.S., this includes Phoenix, Arizona ranking second in the world in kidnappings for ransom as well as hundreds of Americans being brutalized, raped, and killed. U.S. efforts to eliminate the illicit drug trade are simply not working. During a recent visit to Mexico, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton acknowledged the U.S. shares the blame for the escalating violence in Mexico due to U.S. demand for drugs and the supply of weapons. "Clearly, what we have been doing has not worked and it is unfair for our incapacity...to be creating a situation where people are holding the Mexican government and people responsible."¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Fox News, "Clinton: U.S. Shares Blame in Mexico Drug Wars," FoxNews.com, [online], Available from <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/first100days/2009/03/25/clinton-heads-mexico-amid-major-drug-related-violence-border/>, March 25, 2009.

Secretary Clinton further stated, “Our insatiable demand for illegal drugs fuels the drug trade. Our inability to prevent weapons from being illegally smuggled across the border to arm these criminals causes the deaths of police officers, soldiers, and civilians.”¹⁵¹ In response, President Barack Obama has pledged to send more money, technology, and manpower to secure the border. This is in addition to the \$1.4 billion the Bush administration previously pledged to Mexico. While financial support is definitely helpful, it’s simply not the long-term solution. The solution is eliminating the threat, and in the case of Mexican DTOs, it’s the individuals responsible for the escalating violence and bloodshed. How is it possible Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, the Mexican drug lord for the Sinaloa Cartel, is a free man? One of the biggest suppliers of cocaine in the U.S., El Chapo is responsible for thousands of drug-related deaths in the U.S. Instead of portraying El Chapo in the U.S. media as a terrorist, Forbes Magazine highlights his accomplishments by comparing him with honest businessmen. To be clear, Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman and Usama Bin Laden are one in the same. They are both responsible for terrorist acts on U.S. soil resulting in the deaths of thousands of Americans. The same effort the U.S. put into going after Usama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 is the same level of effort the U.S. must put into going after Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman and every other narco-terrorist threatening U.S. national security. The U.S. is at war with terrorists and drug traffickers, and a counter narco-terrorism strategy that applies all the right resources and capabilities against this threat is well overdue.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

“The combined capabilities and military cooperation between Mexico and the United States can defeat the drug cartels that plague both countries.”¹⁵²

Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 7, 2009

VII. Recommendations

In addition to the primary recommendation of this thesis that a U.S. Counter Narco-Terrorism Strategy must be developed, presented below are four additional recommendations that should be considered for implementation. The current strategy for combating narco-terrorism in the U.S. is inadequate, and even more troubling, nonexistent for some U.S. departments and agencies having direct input and responsibility for the security of the nation. Before it becomes a national crisis, the U.S. government must plan, prepare, and respond to the very credible and emerging threat of narco-terrorism. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina on August 28, 2005 are two very costly examples of the U.S. being unprepared. More specifically, preventing the September 11th terrorist attacks from occurring and the inability to rapidly respond to a natural disaster clearly demonstrated a lack of preparedness at every level of the U.S. government in crisis action planning. Unfortunately, it wasn't until after these two tragic events occurred the U.S. government took the initiative to plan and prepare for the possibility of similar future crisis. Identifying a threat exists, developing a strategy to overcome the threat, and then applying all available resources and capabilities to prevent or quickly respond to the

¹⁵² U.S. Department of Defense, “Mullen Praises Military Cooperation Between Mexico, U.S.,” American Forces Press Service, [online}, Available from <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=53381>, March 7, 2009.

threat are three fundamental steps that must be accomplished to ensure the continued security of the nation. The threat today in the U.S. is narco-terrorism, and this threat is originating in Mexico. Michael Hayden, former Central Intelligence Agency director, put Mexico second to Iran as a top national security threat to the U.S.¹⁵³ The following four recommendations are aimed at addressing narco-terrorism as it exists today. The recommendations are not listed in priority, but rather they are measures that should be simultaneously implemented.

Mexico is facing a crisis that has the potential for escalating into a civil war between the Mexican government and Mexican DTOs. The rising death toll coupled with the inability of the Mexican government and its law enforcement to end the violence clearly indicates the need for outside assistance. This assistance must come from the U.S. for several reasons. First, the U.S. must take responsibility for fueling this crisis. It is the demand in the U.S. that is at the heart of the problem facing Mexico. As long as there is U.S. demand for illicit drugs, there will be ongoing turf battles among competing DTOs. Unfortunately, the ensuing bloodshed and violence isn't just impacting the criminal element, innocent civilians are suffering the consequences as well. Over 7,300 killed in a 2-year period at the hands of warring DTOs fully validates this assertion. Second, the U.S. must take extreme measures to eliminate the flow of firearms across the border into the hands of the drug cartels. "The number of U.S. guns in Mexico is growing. The Justice Department's ATF says more than 7,700 guns sold in America were traced to Mexico in the fiscal year ending September 2008. That's twice the 3,300

¹⁵³ Carter, "100,000 foot soldiers in Mexican cartels."

recorded the previous year and more than triple the 2,100 traced the year before that.”¹⁵⁴

Mexico’s army and law enforcement agencies are simply out-gunned by armed DTOs that are being heavily armed with weapons clearly being funneled into the country illegally from the U.S. With a better warfighting capability, more revenue at their disposal, and a force size comparable to that of the nation’s army, the Mexican government doesn’t stand a chance against a more formidable enemy. Finally, the U.S. stands to lose much more in the long run if Mexico is left to fend for itself. If the violence continues to escalate and it results in the eventual collapse of the Mexican government, the U.S. will be faced with a migration problem of immense proportions. With a 2,000 mile permeable border and the approximate 12 million Mexican immigrants already residing in the U.S., it is hard to imagine millions of refugees pouring across the border to escape the violence and chaos. The U.S. has a moral obligation to come to the aid of Mexico, and current diplomatic efforts and the promise of economic aid for training and equipment simply isn’t enough. The violence has escalated to the point where military action is required to restore basic law and order in Mexico. After years of fighting insurgents and VEOs in Iraq and Afghanistan, there’s not a more capable or proficient armed force than the U.S. military to join forces with the Mexican army to put an end to the lawlessness and violence crippling the country. Once the basic rule of law is restored to Mexico, then and only then will diplomacy and economic assistance have a chance to secure any long-term success.

The next recommendation involves the development of a plan for responding to the crisis in Mexico. U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) is responsible for

¹⁵⁴ Millman, “U.S. Gun Trial Echoes in Drug-Torn Mexico.”

Homeland Defense and civil support within its assigned area of responsibility (AOR), in addition to defending, protecting, and securing the U.S. and its interests.¹⁵⁵ To assist in accomplishing this mission, USNORTHCOM has a subordinate command, Joint Task Force North (JTF-North), based at Biggs Army Airfield, Fort Bliss, TX. JTF-North was originally established in 1989 as Joint Task Force Six (JTF-6) in response to President George H. W. Bush's declaration of the "War on Drugs."¹⁵⁶ Today, JTF-North's mission includes "supporting federal law enforcement agencies in the interdiction of suspected transnational threats within and along the approaches to the continental U.S. The threats are those activities conducted by individuals or groups that involve international terrorism, narco-trafficking, alien smuggling, weapons of mass destruction, and the delivery systems for such weapons that threaten the national security of the U.S."¹⁵⁷ Without question, the increasing threat of narco-terrorism and the associated violence plaguing Mexico and the U.S. clearly falls within JTF-North's assigned mission. As a joint service command made up of active duty and reserve component Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and DoD civilian specialists, the crisis in Mexico must become JTF-North's priority. As an established Joint Task Force, JTF-North is poised to immediately respond with force to the crisis in Mexico. Therefore, if not already in progress, JTF-North should be developing a contingency plan for Mexico that can be immediately implemented upon approval.

While USNORTHCOM's AOR is primarily the continental U.S., Alaska, Canada, and Mexico, USOUTHCOM is primarily responsible for Central and South America, the

¹⁵⁵ U.S. Northern Command, [online], Available from <http://www.northcom.mil/About/index.html>.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Joint Task Force North, [online], Available from <http://www.jtfn.northcom.mil/>.

Caribbean, Cuba, and the Panama Canal area.¹⁵⁸ Two of USSOUTHCOM's primary missions in its' AOR is combating narco-terrorism and counter-drug operations. To assist in accomplishing these missions, USSOUTHCOM employs JIATF-South. As previously mentioned, JIATF-South's primary mission is to "conduct counter illicit trafficking operations, intelligence fusion, and multi-sensor correlation to detect, monitor, and handoff suspected illicit trafficking targets."¹⁵⁹ JIATF-South is also responsible for "promoting security cooperation and coordinating country team and partner nation initiatives in order to defeat the flow of illicit traffic."¹⁶⁰ JIATF-South has experienced great success in intercepting the flow of drugs from South America. Over the past 20 years, JIATF-South has stopped 2,300 MTs of cocaine from coming to the U.S.¹⁶¹ In addition to cocaine, JIATF-South is also credited with interdicting 705,000 pounds of marijuana, 4,600 traffickers, almost 1,100 vessels, and a grand total of approximately \$190 billion¹⁶² However, while JIATF-South continues to realize great mission success, Admiral Mike Mullen keeps the enormity of the drug trafficking problem in perspective. During his visit to JIATF-South on January 15, 2008, Admiral Mullen remarked, "I worry about what I see – and I've seen this over the last couple of years – the volume of drugs that continues to emanate from this part of the world."¹⁶³ While it's difficult to estimate the volume of illicit drugs that successfully reach the U.S., the fact Mexican and Colombian DTOs launder between \$18 billion and \$39 billion annually is a good

¹⁵⁸ U.S. Southern Command, [online], Available from <http://www.southcom.mil/appssc/index.php>.

¹⁵⁹ Joint Interagency Task Force South, [online], Available from <http://www.jiatfs.southcom.mil/>.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ U.S. Southern Command, "A National Treasure...JIATF-South," [online], Available from <http://www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/Blog.php?id=41>, February 26, 2009.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman, CJCS all hands JIATF-S, [online], Available from http://www.jcs.mil/chairman/speeches/080115cjcs-all_hands_jiatf-s.html, January 15, 2008.

indication it is a significant amount.¹⁶⁴ With approximately 90 percent of the cocaine and 47 percent of the heroin that reaches the U.S. originating or passing through Colombia and Mexico, JIATF-South's mission is absolutely critical to U.S. national security.¹⁶⁵ To make it even more difficult for JIATF-South, Mexican DTO's are continuing to develop more sophisticated drug trafficking methods. With significant resources at their disposal, DTOs are evading U.S. maritime detection and interdiction efforts by using elaborate networks of go-fast boats and self-propelled semi-submersible watercraft, which are virtually impossible to detect on the open ocean.¹⁶⁶ As long as detection and interdiction remains a U.S. priority for eliminating the illicit drugs leaving Central and South America, JIATF-South must have the priority for more resources to accomplish their mission. This additional capability is required so JIATF-South can be even more successful at interdicting the illicit drugs flowing through their AOR and headed for the U.S. and Europe.

The final recommendation goes to the heart of this thesis, and that is America's passion for illicit drugs. All the countermeasures in the world can be implemented to stop the flow of drugs, but as long as there is a demand, resourceful criminals will always find ways to supply a product. The product doesn't have to be cocaine, heroin, or marijuana. The illicit product can be anything that produces a feeling of euphoria or a means to mentally escape the pressures of everyday life. The only long-term solution for significantly reducing or eliminating the demand for illicit drugs is education. As the

¹⁶⁴ *National Drug Threat Assessment 2009*, III.

¹⁶⁵ U.S. Southern Command, [online], Available from <http://www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/pages/counterNarco.php>.

¹⁶⁶ *Drug Control*, 18.

U.S. goes deeper into debt, spending well over a trillion dollars attempting to rescue a faltering economy, how much effort is the U.S. putting towards eliminating the demand for drugs and on educating Americans about the harmful side effects from drug abuse? Clearly not enough. As previously stated, more than 35 million Americans use illicit drugs or abuse prescription drugs, which is roughly 8 percent of the population.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, these same Americans spend roughly \$14 billion annually on illicit drugs, which in turn goes directly to fund narco-terrorism.¹⁶⁸ There isn't a more important time in our nation's history where education will chart the course for future generations, and the U.S. government just doesn't seem overly concerned. Narco-terrorism has reached America and it is escalating. The violence in Mexico is bleeding across the border into towns across the U.S. The driving force behind this increasing and unopposed threat is the demand for illicit drugs. While the overall goal of the U.S. National Drug Control Strategy is to reduce illicit drug use, the demand in the U.S. has remained relatively stable for many years and this must be recognized as a national crisis. If President Obama truly wants to make a change Americans can believe in, it starts with ensuring America is safe and secure, both today and in the future. It is now up to the Obama Administration to recognize the growing threat facing America and to put the same amount of effort into ending America's dependency on drugs as he has on ending the economic crisis. Narco-terrorism is threatening America's freedom, and education is the only weapon against this threat that will have long-term success. If you eliminate the demand for drugs, you eliminate the threat of narco-terrorism.

¹⁶⁷ *National Drug Threat Assessment 2009*, III.

¹⁶⁸ Corchado, "Drug czar says U.S. use fueling Mexico violence."

"If the enemy is to be coerced, you must put him in a situation that is even more unpleasant than the sacrifice you call on him to make. The hardships of the situation must not be merely transient - at least not in appearance. Otherwise, the enemy would not give in, but would wait for things to improve."¹⁶⁹

Carl Von Clausewitz

VIII. Conclusion

The global drug trade continues to plague the U.S. by threatening American families, their finances, and their freedoms. In addition to an unacceptable toll on American lives, illicit drugs pose a serious threat to U.S. national security. Many countries have fallen victim to governmental corruption and destabilization as a result of the drug trade, and this should serve as a continuous warning to the rest of the world as to the gravity of this global problem. As long as there is a global demand for illicit drugs, the enormous profits from the drug trade will continue to attract criminals of all types as well as facilitate the activities of terrorists and organized criminals worldwide. For the U.S. the situation is even more troublesome. Faced with a faltering economy, which will inevitably lead to reductions in national defense, every American should anticipate an increase in the threat to U.S. national security. This threat increase will be fueled by what most enemies of the U.S., and more importantly terrorists, perceive to be the end of a long-standing imperialistic influence on the world. Without question, terrorism will continue to be a threat to the U.S. for the foreseeable future. The current and future challenge for the U.S. will be preventing another terrorist attack similar to the one that occurred on September 11, 2001. While the majority of effort in the GWOT is

¹⁶⁹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*. Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Random House, Inc., New York: Everyman's Library, 1993, 85.

concentrated in regions of the world that do not pose an immediate threat to Americans, there is a terrorist presence in countries in close proximity to the U.S. that continues to emerge unopposed.

The events that occurred on September 11, 2001 led to a new appreciation for global terrorism. The direct attack on U.S. soil forever changed the world by demonstrating even the most powerful nation is vulnerable to a large scale and well organized terrorist operation. Today, nations around the world are aligning to combat this ever present threat to global security. The GWOT and the “War on Drugs” are inseparable, with agencies from around the world working together as a force-multiplier in an effort to eliminate both terrorism and the illicit drug trade. The long-term solution for eliminating the illicit drug trade and its associated violence is the removal of the demand for illicit drugs. The illicit drug business will endure as long as there are huge profits to be made. An even larger threat from the illicit drug trade is the revenue generated from this highly profitable industry that is then funneled to terrorist organizations. While most of the U.S. is fixated on its collapsing economy and the continued fighting in the Middle East, the threat of narco-terrorism is creeping closer to the U.S. quicker than Americans realize. Americans need to look no further than their bordering neighbor Mexico, which is on the verge of complete chaos. The escalating bloodshed and violence holding Mexico hostage today is currently bleeding over the border into the U.S. One of the hardest hit states is Arizona, and the residents who live there would most likely argue narco-terrorism has already arrived in the U.S. Arizona is currently experiencing an increase in violence in several cities, and the terrorism Arizona residents are suffering is the direct result of warring Mexican drug cartels. However, it is

the overwhelming demand for illicit drugs in the U.S. that continues to fuel the violence.

The five recommendations presented in this thesis are the initial measures the U.S. should immediately put into action to prevent the continued spread of narco-terrorism. Restating the thesis statement of this paper, “Narco-terrorism is recognized by U.S. leadership and policymakers as a legitimate threat to U.S. national security; however, a standalone counter narco-terrorism strategy does not exist. The current approach for combating narco-terrorism is embedded within U.S. counter-terrorism and counter-drug policies. To successfully combat the increasing threat of narco-terrorism, the U.S. must develop a strategy that successfully merges intelligence, law enforcement, military, governmental agencies, and technology specifically designed to defeat a very unique threat.” Why is the U.S. military deployed around the world into harms way to defend other nations against VEOs and terrorism, but yet when innocent Americans are being killed and brutalized everyday on U.S. soil the country is disinclined to use the same military capability to protect and defend its own citizens? When a U.S. city ranks second in the world in kidnappings for ransom, why is the story referred to in U.S. news as local criminal activity and left for local law enforcement to handle on its own? Is a \$1.4 billion “anti-drug” assistance package for equipment, technology, and training really going to end the violence that has claimed over 7,300 lives in a 2-year period in a country that borders the U.S.? Finally, if it were Al Qaeda, instead of Mexican DTOs, responsible for the bloodshed and violence occurring almost daily on U.S. soil would Americans react differently towards the threat? These questions go directly to the core of the issue in understanding the threat confronting America. As defined in the beginning, narco-terrorism is viewed as a politically-motivated concept in dealing with high-profile

organizations. This is how the U.S. defines narco-terrorism, and it is exactly why there has been little to no response to the escalating violence in Mexico, which is now spilling over into U.S. cities and towns. Before narco-terrorism can be eliminated, it must be correctly identified and accepted as the organized employment of violence against the local populace, law enforcement, and the government to intimidate anyone contemplating resistance to drug trafficking. Until America acknowledges a terrorist threat exists in the country, narco-terrorism will continue to expand and American citizens will continue to pay the ultimate price. To successfully defeat narco-terrorism, the U.S. must first clearly define the problem and the associated threat. Once identified, the U.S. must then apply all of its available resources and capabilities to defeat the enemy. Simply put, the threat posed by Al Qaeda and the threat posed by Mexican DTOs are one in the same - terrorism. It shouldn't take a single event on a single day that results in mass casualties for the U.S. to take notice and then rise up to defeat the enemy. Narco-terrorism exists today in America. The enemy is real and the threat to every American is increasing. The time is well overdue for America to recognize narco-terrorism as a significant threat to U.S. national security.

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VITA

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